gamesTM

PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro gaming



FEATURE
OVER THE EDGE
Is originality in gaming dead?

TIMELINE
A BRIEF HISTORY OF VIDEOGAMES
From Pong to Pokémon to the present day

PREVIEW
DOOM III
The full horror revealed

FULL REVIEWS
- GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY [PS2]
- STARFOX ADVENTURES [GC]
- TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4 [PS2/GC/XB/PC]
- SPLINTER CELL [XB/PC]
- UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP [XB/PC]
- ANIMAL CROSSING [GC]
- KINGDOM HEARTS [PS2]
- PHANTOM CRASH [XB]
- MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE [GC/XB]
- JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE [PS2/GC/XB/PC]
- CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER [PS2]
- DIE HARD: VENDETTA [PS2/GC/XB/PC]
- SERIOUS SAM [XB]
- BLINX [XB]

XBOX VS GAMECUBE VS PS2
This time it's war!

180 PAGES OF GAMES PURITY

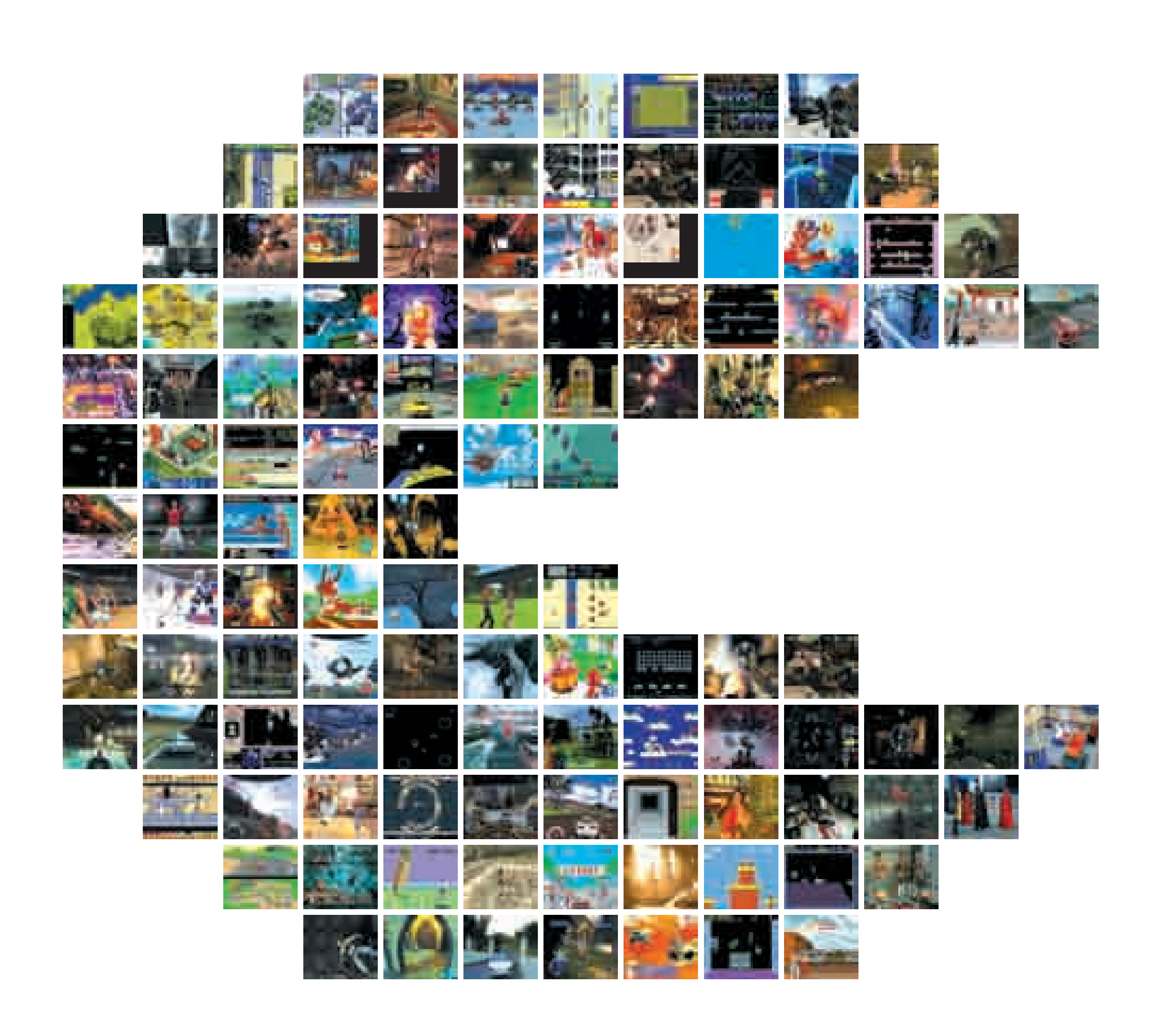
REVIEW
SOUL CALIBUR II
Who said that the first cut is the deepest?


eMag

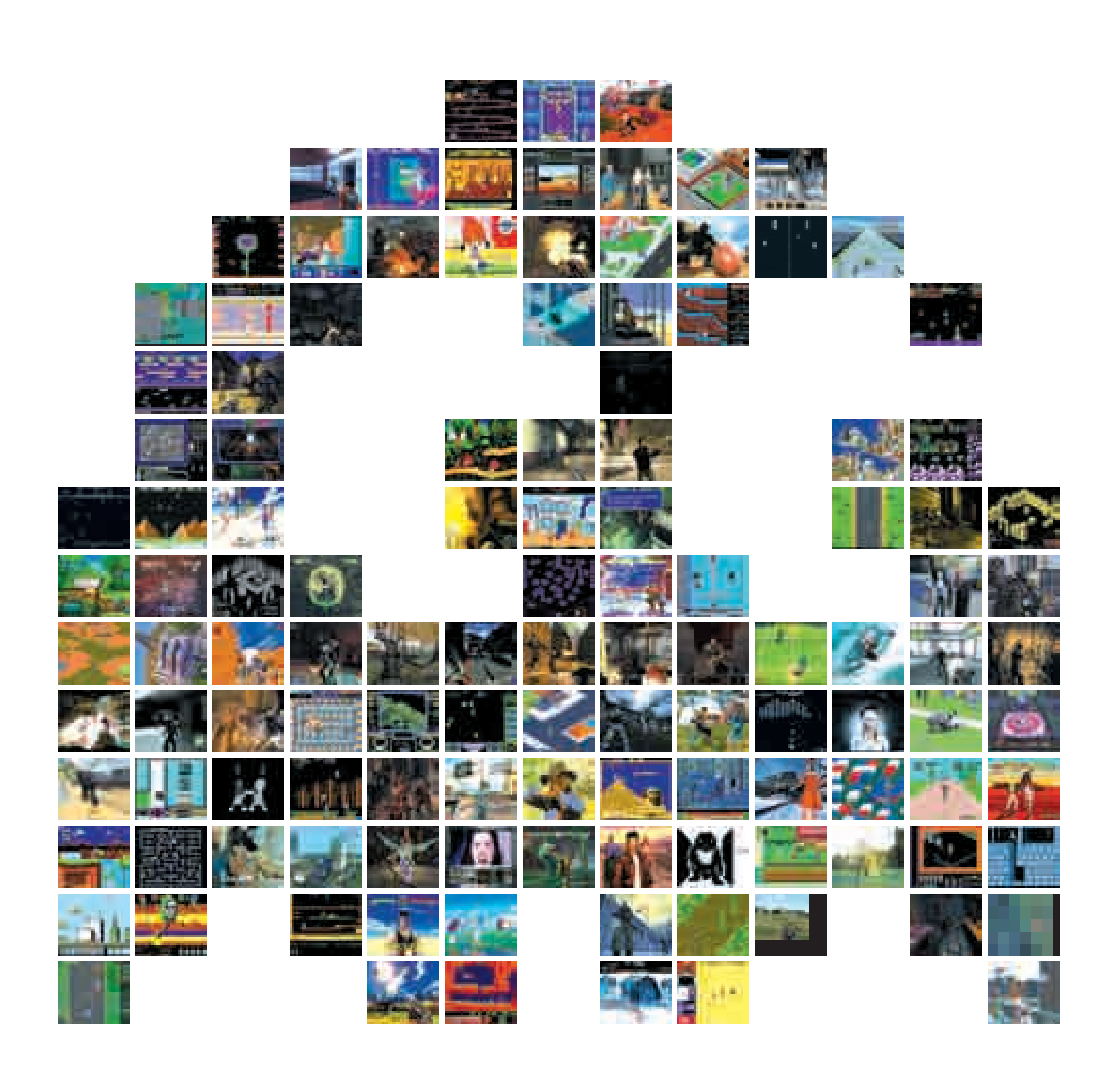
Most magazine launches are timed to catch the slipstream of a console launch – **games™**, as the more observant of you will have already noticed, is different. Unlike every other multiformat magazine, **games™** is a celebration of videogames past, present and future. It revels in a pastime that we are all passionate about and have been part of since we first connected a games system to a TV and abandoned the real world for the pixelated pleasures on offer. Though much has changed over the years, our ardour has yet to wane and is hopefully reflected within these pages.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor.



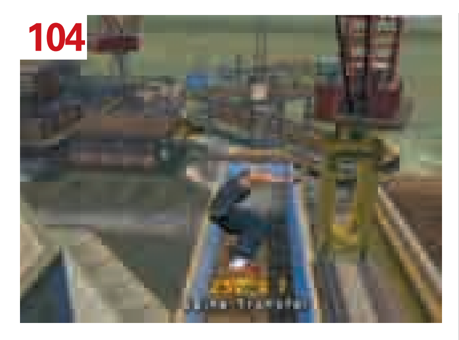


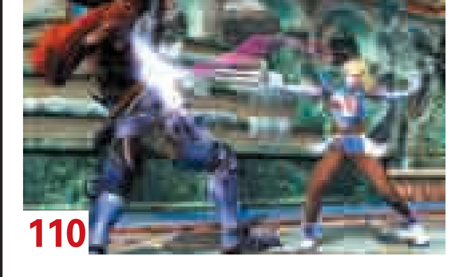
INSERT COIN

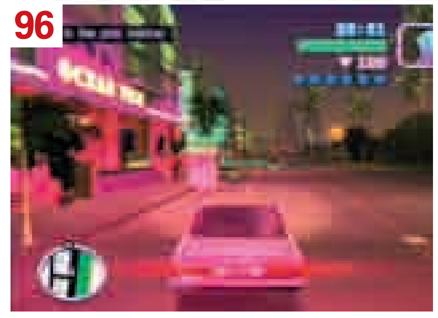


CONTENTS

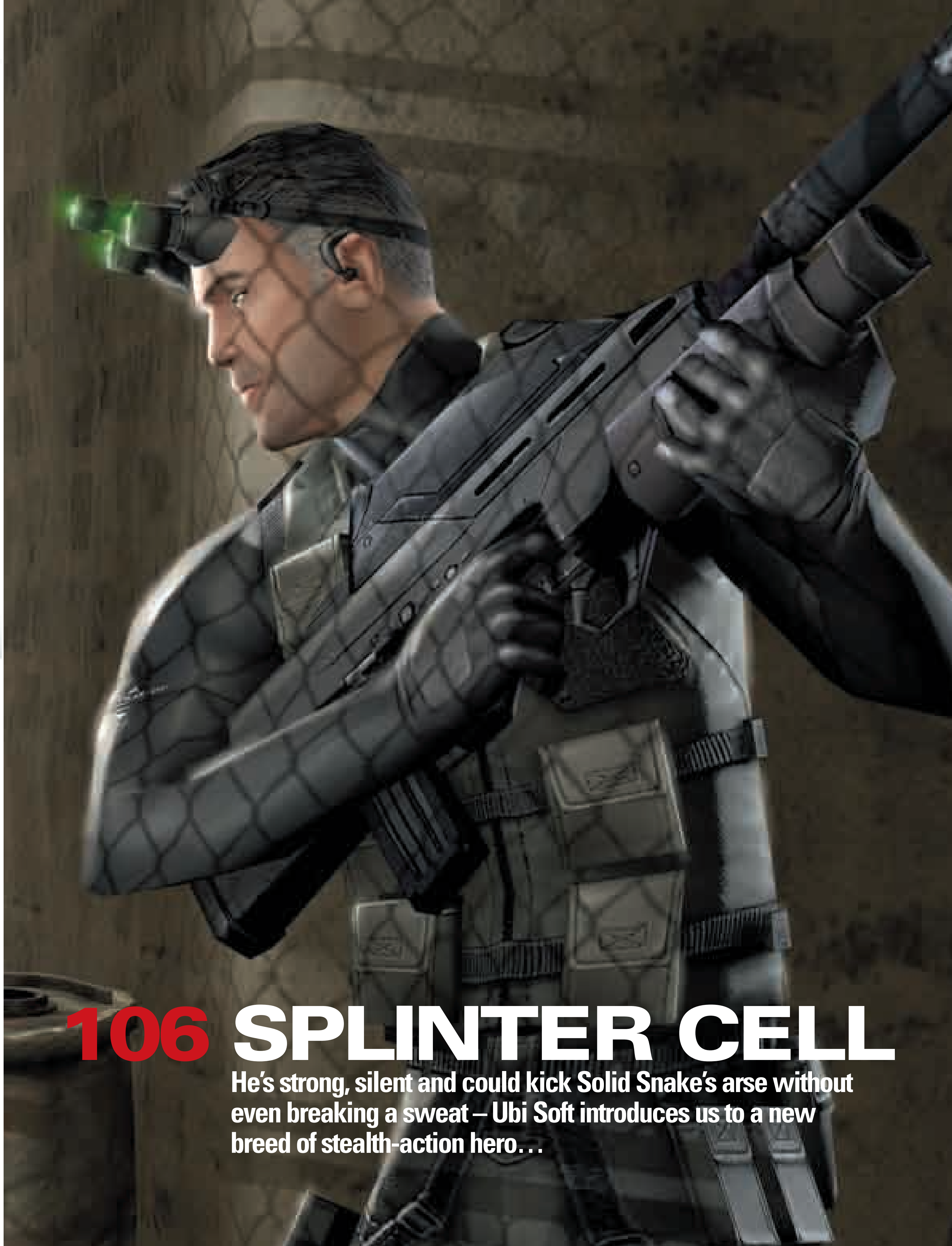



104


110


96





106 SPLINTER CELL

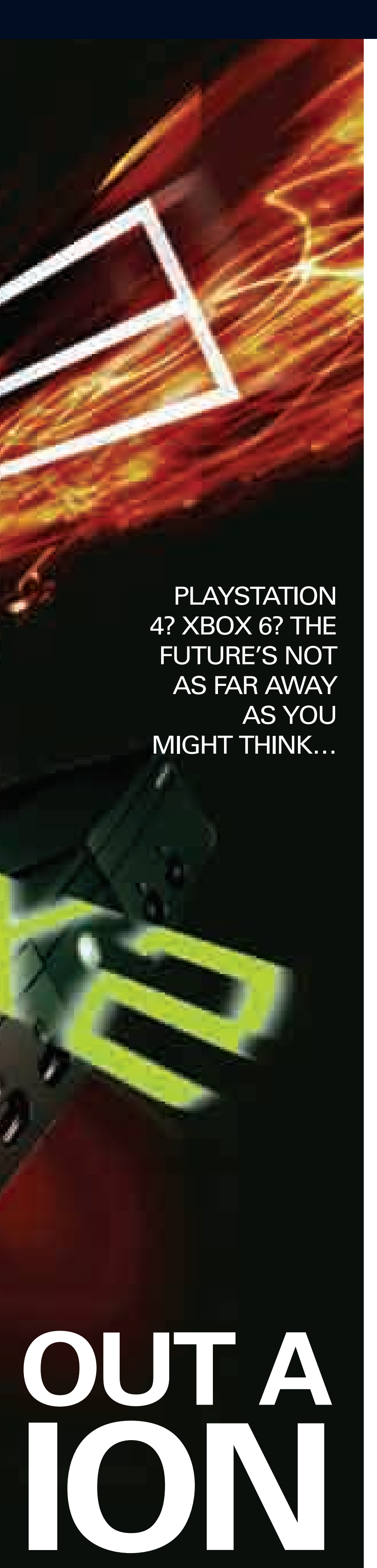
He's strong, silent and could kick Solid Snake's arse without even breaking a sweat – Ubi Soft introduces us to a new breed of stealth-action hero…



CONTENTS

EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT! THESE ARE THIS MONTH'S ESSENTIAL NEWS HIGHLIGHTS.

TALKING 'B
REVOLUT



Some people are just never happy. With the three current next-gen consoles still waiting to be pushed to the limits, it's crazy to think that people are already getting worked up about the next wave of super-consoles. As expected, early bird Sony was the first to sing the praises of its next console. In fact, Shin-ichi Okamoto (a high-ranking figure in Sony's Research and Development department) went on record to say that that PlayStation3 would have: "one thousand times the performance of the PlayStation2", which is a far-fetched claim by anyone's standards. Ever since that announcement, anticipation of the next batch of consoles has been steadily growing and, as time goes on, more rumours and speculations surface about the tech specs of these new machines.

With Microsoft already saying it wants Xbox 2 to be released before the PlayStation3, the race is clearly already on. Microsoft and Sony are obviously head to head to be the first on the scene, but at what price? It would be a shame to see the potential of either machine go to waste – the PS2 was rushed out to kill the Dreamcast's growing market share and, as such, corners had to be cut. More importantly, where will Nintendo fall into the equation? With recent signs of a more aggressive attitude than we've come to expect (demo discs, sponsorships and plentiful advertising), we could see a more aggresive release campaign than ever before from the Japanese giant.

Microsoft and Nintendo do have a common goal, though: toppling Sony from its perch. Be it by forcing it to rush-release the PlayStation3 or by keeping it guessing, the competition simply cannot allow Sony to produce the machine that it claims it will – the combination of Sony's business sense, publicity, brand name and a killer console would be practically unstoppable.

But with such strong line-ups on all three consoles over this holiday period, why look to the future when the present has more than enough to keep us occupied for a good while to come? The scary thing is that the wait has already begun… it almost seems as though people are already starting to hold off and see what the next generation will offer. We're sure it isn't the case, but hopefully this isn't the general perception of the situation. Otherwise, the games industry could be in line for a very slow Christmas, not to mention those people with a whole lot of waiting to do…



J Allard, Microsoft Console Manager. He's looking for a 2004/5 release for Xbox 2 to keep ahead of the market.



Ken Kutaragi, President of Sony Entertainment. Already busy working on PS3 having helped with PSone and PS2.



Satura Iwata, President of Nintendo Japan. Confirmed that GameCube 2 is definitely in development.

XBOX 2: RARE ALREADY?

Recent rumours would suggest that the very first Xbox 2 (working title) development kit has been entrusted to Microsoft's latest star signing, Rare. Several other key developers (including Lionhead, the company behind the upcoming *Black and White 2*) are also said to have been consulted about beginning development early to ensure a good software line-up at and around launch. Given Rare's track record of taking its time over its games, this is hardly surprising – after such an investment, Microsoft needs to ensure that there are plenty of reasons to buy an Xbox 2 from the very start. Early reports suggest a similar PC-based architecture will be used by Microsoft's second console as in its first; this time around, expect a high-end Pentium 4-based processor and modified GeForce 5 graphics card at the heart of the beast. We've all seen what the Xbox can do – a processor four times more powerful is a great starting point for the new machine, while the excellent innovations like the hard drive will also probably be reprised.

PLAYSTATION3: IBM HOLDS THE CHIPS

The obvious evolution from the PlayStation2 has been talked about since the second machine fell somewhat short of the initial pre-launch hype. It looks as if the machine will follow the naming originality trend and be called simply 'Playstation3' – the domains 'ps3.com' and 'ps3.net' have in fact already been bought up by Sony, along with several similar trademarks. Aside from the exaggerated claims of the machine's power, there has been next to no solid info on the PS3. One thing we do know is that the 'Cell' chip that is being co-developed by Sony, IBM and Toshiba is real. Said to be capable of a trillion calculations a second, the chip will most likely be at the heart of the 'Emotion Engine 2' that drives the PS3 and is on course for its 2005 target, or possibly even sooner. This time factor could prevent Sony from being the early bird this time – waiting for such a component could buy Microsoft or Nintendo the time they need to grab the market by the horns and give Sony a taste of its own medicine.

GAMECUBE 2: THE LEGACY LIVES ON

Until very recently, speculation was rife that the GameCube would be Nintendo's last home console. Such rumours were officially laid to rest on October 30, when Nintendo's own Peter MacDougall spoke out at the GKM Conference in America. He spoke of how Nintendo was here to stay in every field in which it currently operates, going on to speak of how "work is well under way on the successor technology to both Game Boy Advance and Nintendo GameCube". This served to dispel any talk of them 'doing a SEGA' and becoming a software-only firm or of shifting their focus to solely the handheld market. Given that this has been the first real mention of a successor to the cubic console, absolutely no details are yet available. Interestingly, Nintendo now has more issues to consider than ever before; both other future machines will most likely offer at least some form of backward compatibility. With a sequel to its first disc-based machine, they could well follow suit. The question is, will they?



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



NAMCO AT THE MOVIES

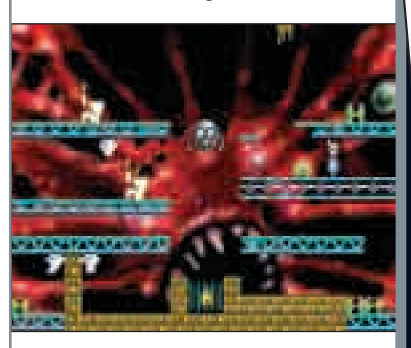
Even though there's a wealth of decent names to choose from, the latest gaming franchise to make the leap onto the big screen is… *Pac-Man*. Yes, that's right – a large yellow ball with eyes, who spends all his days eating pills and chasing ghosts. Great. As it stands, the film is being developed as a joint venture between Gaga Communications and Crystal Sky (the same firms who are currently working on the *Tekken* movie) but no plot details have been revealed to date… thank God.

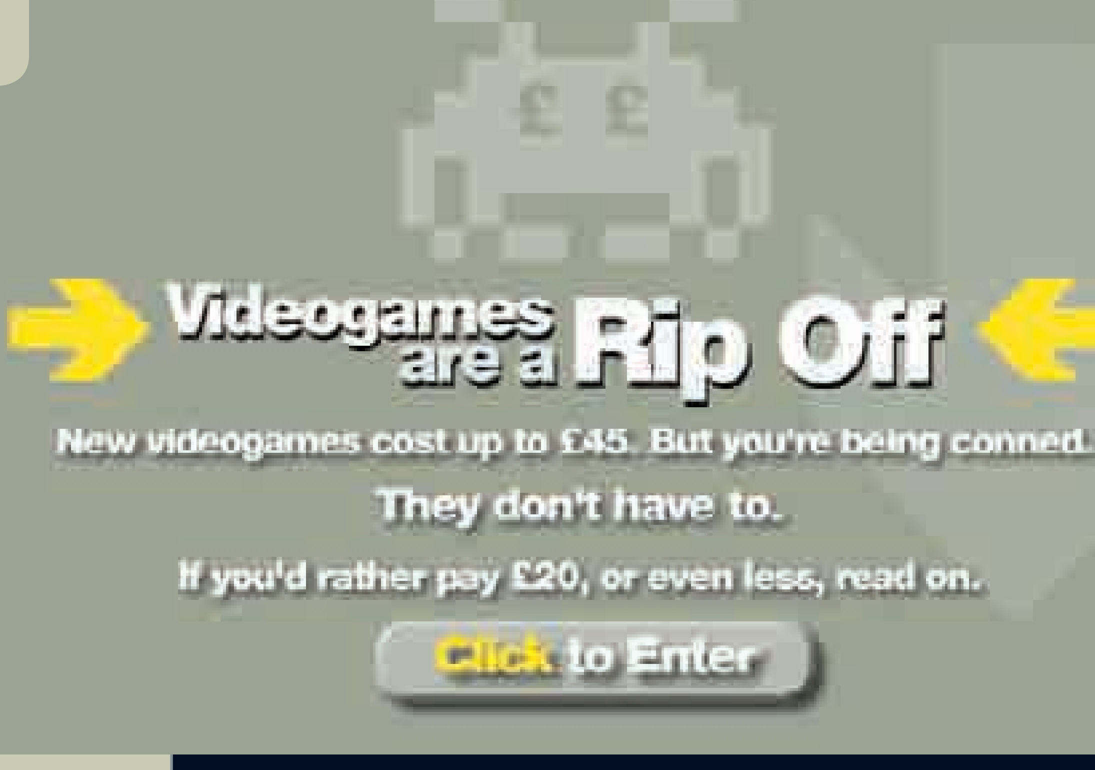




WILLY GETS EVEN SMALLER

Having already made one massive leap from the old-school world of the Spectrum to the Game Boy Advance, miner Willy is now set to shrink down even further – *Manic Miner* is coming to a mobile phone near you. As long as you're lucky enough to own a Java-enabled phone (available around the time you're reading this), you'll be able to play all 20 levels of the original game. What's more, publishers Jester are promising more down-loadable stages in future and more retro games.





A FAIR PRICE TO PLAY?

DO GAMES COST TOO MUCH? FAIRPLAY THINKS SO AND IT MIGHT KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT…

A few weeks ago, a small group of industry insiders, calling themselves FairPlay, launched a campaign to boycott videogame stores between December 1 and 8 to raise awareness for its cause. FairPlay's argument is that if music CDs can retail for £10 to £15, then why can't videogames? The group suggests that production costs are comparable, after all. While publishers have refused to go on record about the subject, many were outraged that such a campaign should be started in the first place – pointing out that they're struggling to make a profit even with the prices as high as they are. FairPlay thinks that if prices were cut, people would theoretically buy a larger quantity of games, therefore generating a larger turnover. But is there anything to suggest that this is the case?

"We can't see where they're coming from", says Roger Bennett, Director General of ELSPA, who has become something of a spokesman about the subject for the entire industry. His feeling is that FairPlay hasn't really done its research and that there are a lot of hidden costs that constantly push up the price of videogame production. We spoke exclusively to the people behind FairPlay who, unsurprisingly, wouldn't reveal their identities. Even without any real facts and figures to back up their claims, the group still maintains that games should be cheaper.

"Major-artist albums cost many millions of pounds to produce, much like a game," a Fairplay representative said. "They sell similar numbers of copies to the top-selling games and cost almost exactly the same amount to manufacture, so why do games cost four times as much? We think music CDs are absolutely the nearest comparison to videogames."

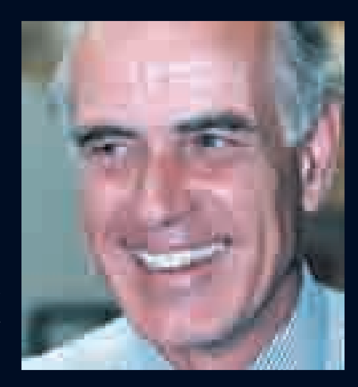
VIDEOGAMES ARE A RIP OFF

A ONE-WEEK VIDEOGAME BOYCOTT

1st - 8th December 2002
DON'T BUY A VIDEOGAME WEEK
FairPlay
ACTION FOR VIDEOGAME PRICE REDUCTION
www.fairplay-campaign.co.uk

"IF CONSUMERS HAD A PROBLEM WITH THE PRICE OF GAMES, THEY'D STOP BUYING THEM"

ROGER BENNETT, DIRECTOR GENERAL, ELSPA





Of course, what FairPlay fails to take into account is that the music industry generates revenue from areas other than just CD sales. A well-known pop act, for example, can make up a large percentage of its annual income from TV appearances and merchandising, two things that few videogames can rely upon.

We also pointed out that a special edition DVD can cost in excess of £25 and will provide perhaps five hours of entertainment, while for £15 extra, a good videogame can easily last for well over 20 hours. At this point, Fairplay decided to make an unprovoked attack on ELSPA, saying: "Fifty hours is what ELSPA claims is the 'average', despite ELSPA being a bunch of old men who probably haven't played a videogame since *Galaxian*". Naturally ELSPA wasn't impressed: "We find their opinion very ageist and really don't think there's any weight behind their campaign". Indeed, the FairPlay group doesn't seem overly professional in its dealings – we were kept waiting because the spokesperson was out buying *GTA: Vice City*, of all things.

Despite its approach though, FairPlay does make a good point. While it perhaps isn't fair to directly compare the music or film industries to videogames, is there any real evidence to suggest that games should cost so much? Developers would argue that the creation process is taking more people more time than ever before, but seeing as none of them will disclose any actual facts and figures, all we can do is take their word for it. But then, do we really believe that EA has invested so much money in developing this season's update of *FIFA* that it justifies another £40 of our hard-earned cash? Obviously we do, as the latest version went to number one in the multi-format games chart. It's like Roger Bennett says: "If consumers had a problem with the price of games, they'd stop buying them". Well, perhaps that'll happen as a direct result of the FairPlay campaign



What would FairPlay have to say about this? Capcom's *Steel Battalion* includes an enormous controller with over 40 buttons and is expected to launch for as much as £200 next year. Suddenly £40 doesn't look so bad after all…

CHEAP GAMES

One thing that FairPlay failed to comment on is that there are cheaper alternatives if the consumer doesn't want to spend the full £40 on a game. Sony's PS2 platinum range, for example, offers an ever-growing selection of quality titles for just £19.99. On top of that, there's the second-hand market which is active for all three consoles, both in high street stores and through on-line auctions.







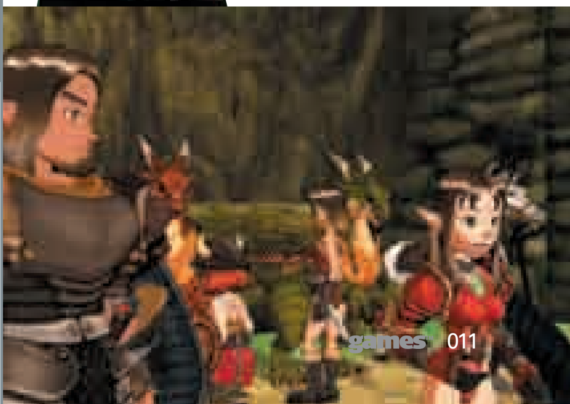
XBOX DEAD IN JAPAN?

AFTER AN UNSUCCESSFUL NINE MONTHS, MICROSOFT TRIES AGAIN…

Xbox is failing in Japan, there's no denying it. Despite the country's fascination with America, it seems uneasy investing in a non-Japanese product; so far just 278,860 Xbox consoles have been sold, compared to almost 700,000 GameCubes during the same period. These embarrassing figures have resulted in Hirohisa Ohura, Director of Xbox Japan, being moved to a different department within Microsoft, hinting that a certain amount of re-structuring is about to take place.

Even so, Microsoft refuses to give up the fight in Japan and has revealed a few high-class partnerships with some of the country's most respected developers. From software, for example, has revealed *Otagi* (a *Devil May Cry*-inspired action game) that will launch in Japan before the end of 2002, complete with a TV ad campaign featuring Britney Spears. On top of that, other Japanese developers, such as Level 5, have highlighted their interest in Xbox Live. Previously responsible for the PS2 hit *Dark Cloud*, Level 5 has unveiled a brand new MMORPG entitled *True Fantasy Live Online*, which should be one of the bigger Japanese titles when it launches during 2003.

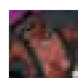
Microsoft has also secured a *Dead Or Alive* collection (tentatively entitled *Dead Or Alive: Code Cronus*), an online fishing game and *Blinx 2*. Whether the inclusion of more Japanese titles in Microsoft's line-up will actually help the sales of Xbox remains to be seen, but it's certainly nice to see a little more Japanese input on the world's biggest console.



True Fantasy Live Online is just one of many upcoming Japanese Xbox games launching through 2002 and 2003.

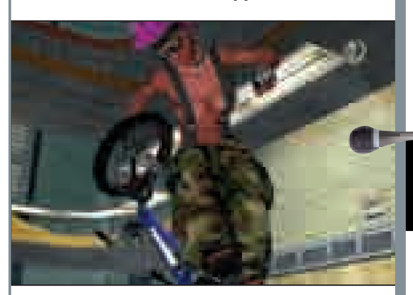
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SEX PLEASE, WE'RE BRITISH

If you're one of those PlayStation2 owners that is outraged by Sony's decision to censor *BMX XXX* by removing all the topless nudity, then fret no longer. Even though the US version is edited, the PAL game is still coming in all its nipple-exposing glory. For reasons left unexplained by SCEE, the European PS2 version of Acclaim's rude, crude and very nude extreme sports title will feature everything that its Xbox and GameCube counterparts have… including every breast, bum cheek and shapely ankle of the FMV strippers. Oooh.





ROBOTS IN DISGUISE

Yes, we know it'll probably end up being rubbish but seeing as we only recently bought the DVD boxset, we still can't help but get slightly excited about the fact that there's a new Transformers game on the way. Expected to appear across all major formats in mid-to-late 2003, no specific details have been revealed as yet (hence our doubts about the final product). Still, anything that helps take us back to a time when we could play with nifty plastic robots without being stared at suits us just fine.





■ Online gaming will let you make new friends across the world – and then shoot them, fight them, laugh at their skateboarding prowess, blow them up…

■ Xbox Live will let you do all your online gaming via a Communicator headset – no need for any fancy typing here.

TAKING ON THE WORLD

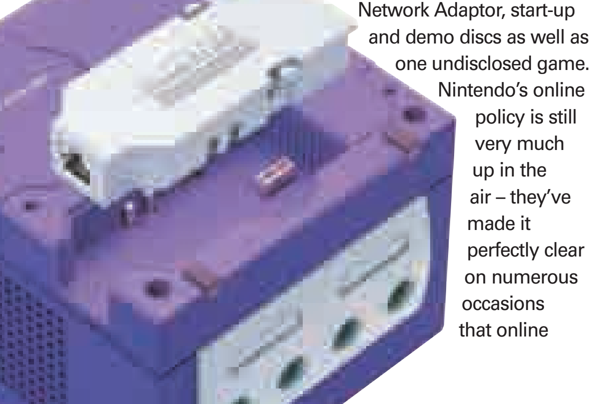
TAKE YOUR FAVOURITE CONSOLE ONLINE FROM EARLY NEXT YEAR

After countless delays and numerous setbacks, both Sony and Microsoft have now confirmed that their consoles will take to the net this coming spring. The much-touted Xbox Live starter pack will retail at £39.99 when it arrives on March 14, exactly a year after the console was first released. The price includes the Communicator headset, the set-up disc and online versions of *Whacked* and *MotoGP*. This cost will also include a year's subscription to the service, with the subsequent yearly fee still to be confirmed.

Sony's offering clocks in £5 dearer at £44.99, which gets you the Network Adaptor, start-up and demo discs as well as one undisclosed game. Nintendo's online policy is still very much up in the air – they've made it perfectly clear on numerous occasions that online gaming is not a priority for this generation of consoles. While the modem and broadband adaptors are available now in the US, this is only in limited numbers to quell the wrath of those GameCube owners who simply *must* go online.

Testing for the Microsoft service has already begun, with the lucky few already ensuring that the online service is as good as it can be before it is made available to the masses. Trials of the PS2 networking will apparently also be starting before the year is out, but it's still not clear how the service will operate yet. Sony will have its work cut out rivalling Microsoft's impressive and comprehensive package. Early online titles will include *Unreal Championship*, *Mech Assault* and *Midtown Madness 3* for Xbox, with the PS2 receiving *SOCOM: US Navy Seals*, *Frequency 2* and *Tony Hawk's 4* amongst others. The GameCube has little more than *Phantasy Star Online Episodes 1&2* to its online name, although it has been made clear that Nintendo do not see online gaming as a concern. Perhaps its attitude towards the subject will change early next year – it all depends on just how successful the other online launches really are.

■ Funny to think that this innocuous-looking purple box holds the key to a whole new world of online gaming. Be afraid, etc…



F-ZERO AC SPEEDS EVER CLOSER

MOTION SICKNESS SUFFERERS, LOOK AWAY NOW

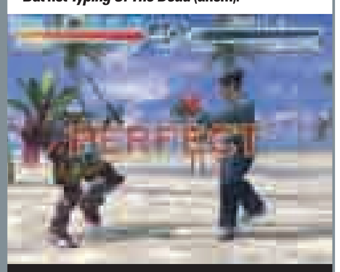
Anyone who even considered the notion that SEGA might not do the acclaimed *F-Zero* series justice should be able to find solace in the new media that has just been made available. The futuristic racer is looking nothing short of stunning, retaining the *F-Zero* look and feel whilst bringing the series firmly into the 21st Century. The collaborative cabinet is said to be in development as a full-size sit-in mock-up of an *F-Zero* vehicle. This will apparently be in the same vein as the *R-360* cabinets of yesteryear, offering a fully moving cockpit that responds to and mimics the player's in-game vehicle. It's also being muttered that the cabinet will sport both high-speed and USB ports – this would not only allow several units to be linked for multi-player racing but, more excitingly, it goes some way to backing up the rumour that GameCube-to-arcade link-up play may be a possibility. In a time where the demise of arcades has never been more apparent, the public demands an experience that cannot be recreated at home. While the game itself is also in development for the GameCube, the cabinet should make *F-Zero AC* an unrivalled arcade racing experience.



The heady days of SEGA's R-360 cabinet could be resurrected with the new *F-Zero* arcade game.

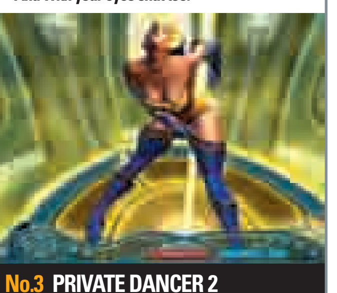
games™ THE TOP FIVE

GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WITH ONE ARM TIED BEHIND YOUR BACK (LITERALLY)



No.5 HOUSE OF THE DEAD 2

But not *Typing Of The Dead* (ahem).



No.4 TEKKEN 4

And with your eyes shut too.



No.3 PRIVATE DANCER 2

As long as you've got one hand free…

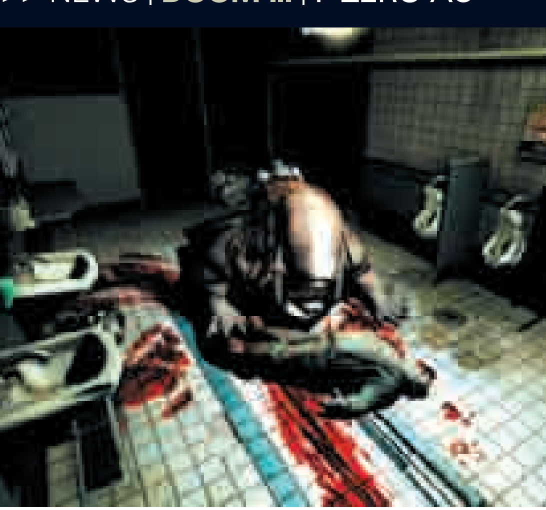


No.2 SUPER MONKEY BALL

Balancing a monkey with one hand is easy.

No.1 DANCE DANCE REVOLUTION

Because you don't need any arms at all.



Domestos may kill all known germs dead (as opposed to killing them slightly?) but we doubt very much that it would be much use against this bathroom-based monstrosity. One of those Bloo things probably wouldn't help either…

WE'RE ALL DOOMED

EARLY VERSION OF ID'S KILLER FPS HITS THE INTERNET

A total lack of new screenshots, virtually no information about the game's content and not a demo in sight – yes, unsurprisingly for a game of such massively anticipated proportions, *Doom III* is being held closer to numerous chests at id Software than a royal flush in a high-stakes poker game. Or at least, it was until some sneaky bugger (no doubt a bounder or cad of some description) leaked a pre-alpha version of the game onto the internet recently. Despite efforts to keep the game completely under wraps – aside from what the company wants us to see, that is – it seems that id Software's tight ship isn't being run as tightly as it might have had liked, meaning that now PC gamers around the world can have a taste of *Doom*'s next big thing.

As you'd expect, id wasn't particularly impressed with the fact that its new balloon had been popped so early. "Yes, we are upset about it," said John Carmack, series creator of *Doom* and technical director at id Software, "and it will certainly have some impact on how we deal with some companies in the future. But nothing drastic is going to change in terms of what support is going to be available. Making any judgements from a snapshot intended for a non-interactive demo is ill advised."

Obviously, those who expect to see great things from this premature release will be disappointed, given that the game is only at the alpha stage. However, the fact that it got out at all is testament to just how far people will go to get their grubby paws on something new. Carmack's comments suggest that a company working close to id might have been involved in the leak, although there's been no clarification of this. Nevertheless, we doubt we'll be seeing anything more on *Doom III* for a long while after this. If you're eager to see what all the fuss is about, check out our preview on page 78.

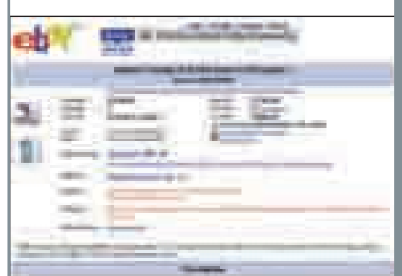
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MULTICOLOURED ANIMAL SWAP SHOP

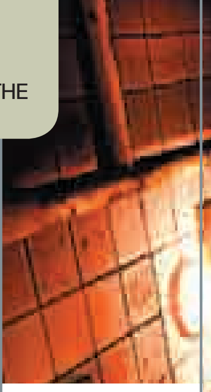
First there was *Animal Crossing*, the game; now there's *Animal Crossing*, the online trading community. Thanks to the game's foolproof password trading system, gamers all over the world have been flocking to message boards across the internet to swap items with each other. If you're feeling a bit affluent, you can even purchase entire sets of items from sellers on eBay – although paying cash for furniture that doesn't actually exist sounds a bit Del Boy to us.





FREELOADING FAILURE

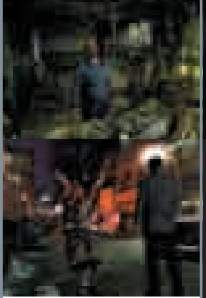
Despite promises that it would be "out soon", the Datel Freeloader has yet to appear on our shelves. The much-anticipated disc – which lets PAL GameCube owners play games from any region – was last seen being tested for multi-disc games before vanishing without trace. According to the Datel website, it's "due in November 2002". Hmm.



Why should the zombie hell be kept in Racoon City? Let the rest of the world join in.



It's heartening to think that nations will join hands to rid the Earth of the undead…



…but what would be really cool would be the option to play as a zombie.

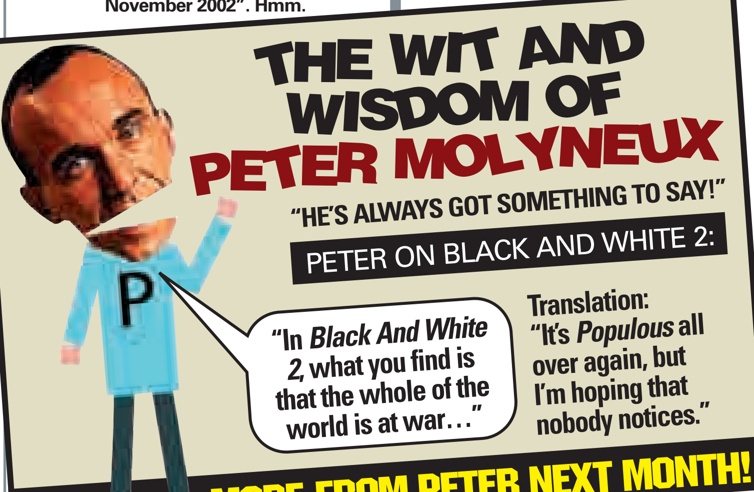


THE EVIL SPREADS

RESIDENT EVIL SHIRKS ITS EXCLUSIVITY

Facts have recently come to light to show that PlayStation2's online survival horror title *Resident Evil Online* is not only still in development, but is shaping up very nicely indeed. With Capcom announcing that the series would be exclusive to Nintendo's console, it was thought that the game would vanish from all schedules – which was mostly the case. A dodgy short video of the game appeared several months ago but it failed to show any graphics or gameplay; this caused us and many others to fear the worst for this promising title. Thankfully, we've been proved wrong as these new screenshots clearly show. Even more promising are details of how this game introduces the series to the online community.

At the moment, it appears that *RE Online* will be a four-player affair, with the action much in the same vein as the adventure-based games rather than the frantic blasting of the *Survivor* offshoots. What's more, players will be able to trade weapons and items, heal each other and assist in the solving of puzzles by means of combining abilities – very interesting. Sadly, no release date has been confirmed as yet but we'll keep you posted with future developments.



GBA ROBBED!

BUT IT'S NOT ALL BAD NEWS…

Pocket gamers will be disheartened to hear that the massively popular *Grand Theft Auto* series is no longer headed for GBA. Originally, the handheld version was being released by Zoo Digital (after Take 2 sold the license to the publisher shortly before the overwhelming success of *Grand Theft Auto 3*), but with Take 2 rumoured to have bought the license back from Zoo, it looks as though the game will never see the light of day. Reasons for the project's cancellation are unclear – when we enquired, both Take 2 and Zoo Digital were unable to comment – but it could potentially be any number of reasons.

Could it be that the game was too ambitious for the handheld? Maybe, but considering the Game Boy Color played host to two versions of *GTA* from a top-down viewpoint, we don't think so. Even if the game was being developed from a third-person view (with no screenshots ever released

SNK NOT DOA

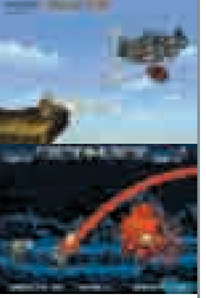
IT'S NOT JUST MICROSOFT WHO CAN 'PLAYMORE'

Not content with bringing legendary developer SNK back from the brink by reopening its US offices, Playmore has already announced that one of the most recent *Metal Slug* titles, *Metal Slug 3*, will be headed for the PlayStation2 next year. This is expected to be the first of many announcements to make SNK a household name. Having churned out genre-topping titles for years, the only thing stopping SNK from being huge was the sheer hard-core, 'underground' nature of their games. This move will bring one of the best series in 2D gaming to a bigger audience than ever before and will hopefully be a success. SNK has nothing to prove with the quality of its games but if it can achieve the commercial success it so clearly deserves, it could well become a major player in the software market. All things being equal, this rebirth should grow to cover all major formats. Hi-res *King Of Fighters* on Xbox, anyone? *Metal Slug* on GBA? Perhaps *Samurai Shodown* on GameCube? While nothing has been even hinted at yet, these certainly sound like appealing prospects to us…

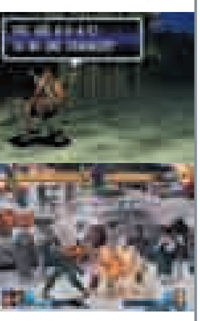




Classic games coming to a console near you? That can only be a good thing.



Metal Slug will get a new lease of life on the next-gen consoles. Thanks, SNK.



Now you too can be the king of fighters with the aptly named, er, *King Of Fighters*.



GAMES ROOM 101

THINGS WE HATE ABOUT VIDEOGAMES

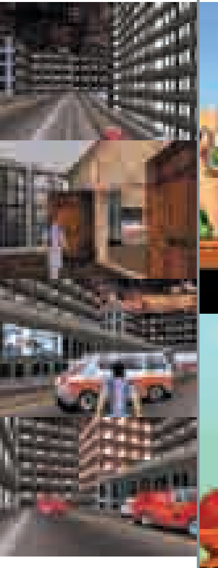
NO.1: WESTERN DEVELOPERS TRYING TO COPY JAPANESE GAMES

If you've ever played a platform, fighting or adventure game that's been developed by a Western company, chances are that it was crap. Okay, so a few slip through the net and manage to be all right (or even rather good) but for the most part, Western attempts at games that have already been mastered by Japanese developers are just plain bad. Why? Numerous reasons, really. It could be down to dodgy level design, poorly executed game mechanics or, worst of all, just really crap characters. Think about it: they get Mario and Sonic, we get Zool and James Pond. They get *StreetFighter 2* and *King Of Fighters*, we get *Body Blows* and *Rise Of The Robots*. They get Link and Chris Redfield, we get, er, um… see? Western attempts at the RPG genre are so forgettable, we can't even think of any decent characters off-hand – it's almost as if we've accepted that they're rubbish and moved on.

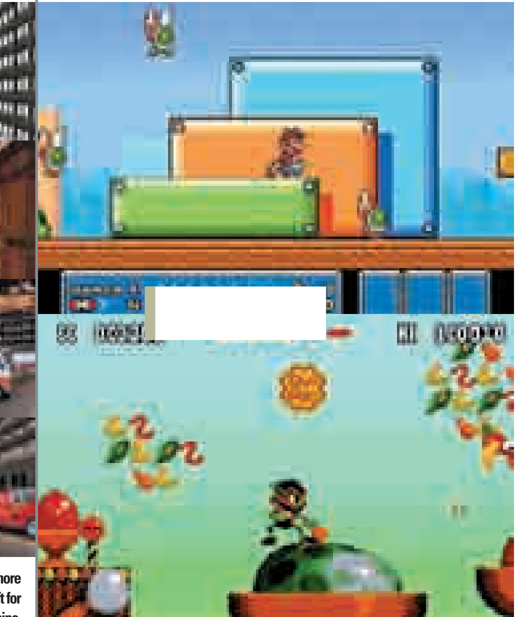
God knows why Western developers can't emulate that certain magic that Japanese games have without royally cocking it up, but it's a fact. On the other hand though, you don't see too many examples of sport, racing, FPS or real-time strategy games coming out of Japan that are worth your attention… so maybe Western developers are great after all, eh?



for the GBA version, it's hard to know), recent evidence has arisen to show that it can be done – although it only exists as a technical demo at the moment, AGB Games has put together the groundwork for a three-dimensional title in the vein of *GTA3*. Dubbed the 'C2 Engine', it now has not only cars but people too. The main controllable character is able to run around, drive cars and shoot (sound familiar?), all the while pushing the GBA hardware to the limits. Visually, this engine does everything right and looks as good as, if not better than, *Ecks Vs Sever 2*. If you can't wait until AGB Games do something with it though, you could always hang on for *Payback!* – a GBA port of an Amiga title that looks a heck of a lot like the older *GTA* games. Currently in development by Apex Designs, the game certainly looks the business and will most likely fill the hole left by *GTA3*'s cancellation. You can keep tabs on its development by heading over to www.apex-designs.net. Looks like every cloud has a silver lining after all…



There'll be no more handheld car theft for you, sunshine.



Data stream

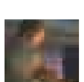
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



FIGHT-A-FRIEND

Capcom has announced that one of its first games to be compatible with Xbox Live will be an online version of *Capcom Vs SNK 2* – the premier fighting game from the Capcom stable at the moment. Obviously, this is great news for beat-'em-up fans everywhere, as they'll now be able to fight against virtually any gamer from around the world. Not surprisingly though, it won't make much of a difference to the Japanese market; they've been enjoying online brawling action since the days of the Dreamcast. Tchoh, typical.





GTA:VC PC?

In a totally un-shocking move (given the obviously huge fan base that the game has), some clever soul has started an online petition to bring *GTA: Vice City* to the PC. And, even more un-shockingly, it's already packed with signatures. Given that Sony has an exclusive contract for the game running all the way into 2004, we doubt you'll be seeing it anytime soon. However, if you feel like adding your name to the cause, you can do so at www.petitiononline.com/mod_perl/signed.cgi?gtavcpc





Fed up of annoying people with a catchy ringtone? Now you can make them listen to you play the latest beat-'em-up instead…

I JUST CALLED TO SAY GAME OVER

ONE SMALL STEP FOR MOBILES, ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MOBILE GAMING

According to mobile phone manufacturers, playing games on your cellphone is the way of the future – even though so far all it amounts to is down-loading slightly crap WAP games or enjoying a quick game of *Snake* while you're on the bus. Thankfully though, all that looks set to become a thing of the past due to new developments in both mobile technology and the games themselves.

As it stands at the moment, there are two companies on the verge of bringing out the new wave in mobile phone gaming. Over at Orange, work is complete on a whole selection of games for the Orange Games Phone – bigger, better games that can be downloaded straight to your mobile for a one-off charge of £1.50 and then stored to be played whenever you like. Powered by mobile games service provider In-Fusio, there are currently two handsets available that can access the new games; the Panasonic GD87e (£129.99 with a 12-month Orange contract) and the Sagem myG5. If you can get your hands on one of them, you'll have a wealth of gaming fun at your fingertips.

Meanwhile, phone giant Nokia has teamed up with a number of high-profile games publishers to develop a new piece of kit called the Nokia N-Gage Mobile Game Deck. The phone-cum-games console can play games stored on specially-made memory cards and Nokia has promised that plenty of games will be produced by its games industry partners for the system – the first developers to be confirmed are SEGA and Taito.

"It is our pleasure to join hands with Nokia for their innovative project," said Tetsu Kayama, Chief Operating Officer, SEGA Corporation. "We promote a multi-platform strategy to supply content to all types of hardware globally and we believe that Nokia and us will create the new genre of mobile games".

Unfortunately, no games have been announced yet, but hopefully we'll be seeing the likes of *Sonic* and *Rainbow Islands* on our mobiles in the very near future.



games™ amnesty

RIDDING GAMERS OF THE SHAME OF OWNING LAME GAMES…

We all make mistakes. We read the magazines and believe the hype generated by publishing companies determined to part you from your hard-earned money. We buy the games, expecting them to be something special but every once in a while, we discover that more enjoyment could be found by allowing a blind chimpanzee to perform cosmetic surgery upon your genitalia. Fear not – we understand, we've been there and, more importantly, we can help.

With no thought whatsoever about cost, *games™* has purchased a very special waste compactor. Into which, without any concern for our own safety, we are prepared to place your gaming embarrassments and crush them into oblivion. So, save face today and send in those games that you'd rather forget you ever purchased.

Turok Evolution? Turok Shite, more like. Hahaaaa…

This month, those of you saddled with the abomination that is *Turok Evolution* can be free of the burden by simply placing it into a brown padded envelope and sending it to:

THE HORROR,
THE HORROR…
games™
Paragon Publishing Ltd,
St. Peter's Road,
Bournemouth,
Dorset.
BH1 2JS

We'll do the rest…


eMag



STICK TO WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT – THAT'S WHAT WE WERE ALWAYS TOLD IN SCHOOL. FUNNILY ENOUGH THOUGH, IT'S ADVICE THAT JAPANESE DEVELOPERS NEVER LISTEN TO – WHICH IS PROBABLY WHY THEY'RE SO GOOD AT EVERYTHING. CAPCOM'S YOSHIHIRO SUDO LET US IN ON THE SECRET OF HIS SUCCESS…

> "IN MY POINT OF VIEW, MOST OF THE RACING GAMES ON THE MARKET AT THE MOMENT CONCENTRATE TOO MUCH ON REALISM – I WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT."
> **YOSHIHIRO SUDO**

YOSHIHIRO SUDO

CAPCOM JAPAN

He might not look it, but Yoshihiro Sudo is a happy man – not just because he works for one of the biggest and most well-known Japanese games developers around today, but also because his new game, *Auto Modellista*, has jumped straight to the top of the Dengeki sales charts. Being the best-selling game around might not sound like much, but it's a big deal in Japan; in a country where the RPG is king, getting to the top spot with a game in a decidedly Western genre is quite an achievement.

Of course, while *Auto Modellista* might be a racing game by definition, the last thing you could brand it as is a Western game. Trust Capcom (and more importantly, the man behind such unique-styled games such as the over-the-top beat-'em-up *Marvel VS Capcom 2* and fighting revolution *Power Stone 2*) to create a driving game with typically Japanese flair; the world's first reality-based cel-shaded racer.

"In my point of view, most of the racing games on the market at the moment concentrate too much on realism," says Sudo-san. "I believe that, on occasion, this can be detrimental to gameplay – I wanted to create something completely different. We pursued fresh and innovative ideas and eventually came up with the cel-shaded graphical technique you see now."

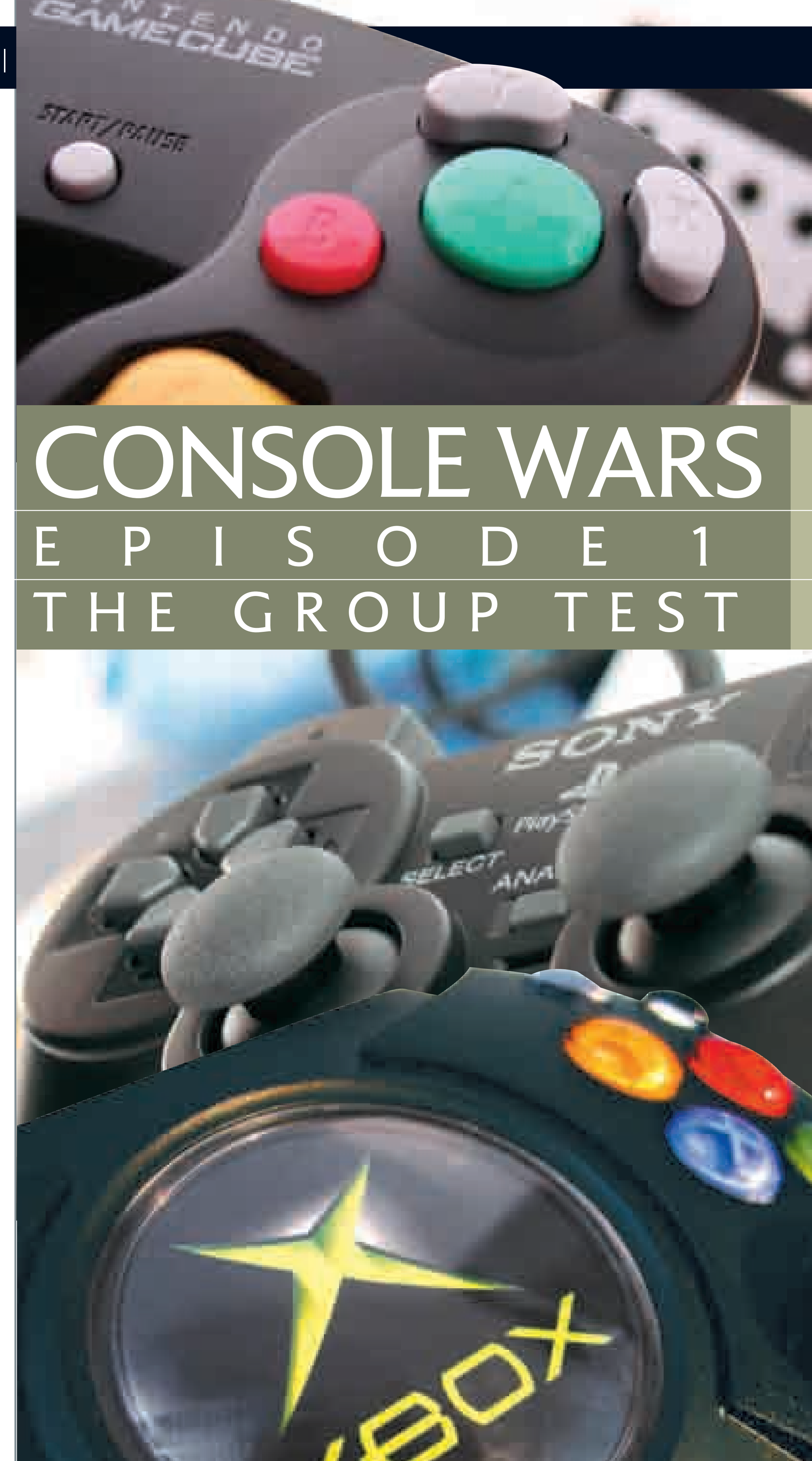
There might be plenty of cel-shaded racing games available these days (what with cartoon style being the current 'in thing'), but *Auto Modellista* is the first to combine cel-shaded graphics with realistic physics. If you need a comparison to get your head around the concept, think *Ridge Racer* meets *Jet Set Radio* with the thrill factor whacked up a couple of notches. Surprisingly though for a game of this nature, the cars are real ones rather than fictional brands. Each vehicle in the game is based on an actual model and looks exactly like its real-life counterpart – albeit in cel-shaded form.

"The cars in this game have all been approved by the relevant car manufacturers," assures Sudo-san. "Actually, most manufacturers were very excited by the prospect of seeing their cars recreated in Capcom's 'artistoon' style."

Cel-shading isn't the only feather in Auto Modellista's cap, however; the game is also the first racer to take advantage of PlayStation2's recently acquired online capabilities. Unfortunately, this aspect of the game hasn't quite grabbed the attention of Japanese gamers as much it could have done – even Sudo-san himself admits that "currently in Japan, most gamers are playing off-line," although he believes that future game environments will lure more gamers online. Being the PS2's first online racing game, you'd expect Capcom to have run into trouble when trying to put the whole thing together. Interestingly, this wasn't the case.

"We started by resolving the infrastructure issue territory by territory, but we didn't face many problems regarding the online creation side," confesses Sudo-san. "However, as a producer and a member of Capcom staff, I would like to thank everyone involved both externally and internally who has supported us through the installation of *Auto Modellista*'s online environment." A humble comment, for someone with so many successes behind him.

With *Auto Modellista* now due out in the UK some time in early 2003 on PS2, things are quickly moving on for Sudo-san and his team – Capcom has already confirmed the development of a sequel. Although there's no confirmed format for it, Sudo-san's comment that "this title is not PS2 exclusive" leads us to believe that we can expect an Xbox and maybe even GameCube version somewhere along the road. Not surprisingly though, there are also other projects in the wings awaiting Sudo-san's attention. Sadly, one of them isn't a much-desired follow-up to *Power Stone 2* ("We don't have any plans regarding this at this moment," says Sudo-san, refusing to be drawn on the subject) but whatever comes next, you can guarantee it'll be something worth your attention…



CONSOLE WARS
EPISODE 1
THE GROUP TEST

THE CURRENT HARDWARE BATTLE IS PROBABLY THE MOST INTENSE THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY HAS EVER SEEN, AND EACH OF THE THREE COMPETITORS HAS A STRONG PRODUCT WITH MANY GREAT QUALITIES. BUT WHICH CONSOLE IS BEST FOR YOU?

Picking a clear winner out of the three frontrunners of the current console generation is an almost impossible task. It may be true that PlayStation2 is way ahead where sales are concerned, but does that make it a better console? Take the Ford Fiesta, for example. It may be more popular than the Jaguar XJS, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's any better. Of course, comparing consoles to cars isn't entirely fair – Jaguars and Fiestas are aimed at two totally different markets and are priced accordingly. Then again, Xbox initially cost £100 more than PS2, suggesting that Microsoft viewed its hardware as the XJS of the console market. So does that mean that with the new pricing structure Xbox owners are buying a Jaguar for the price of a Fiesta?

Perhaps it does, but then does the average family want all that extra power when all it needs is a little runaround to drop the kids at school and get to the supermarket? Surely it would make more sense to choose the mass-market option, which is cheap to run and easy to get spares for. But where does GameCube sit in this battle? Nintendo's cute little purple box may be the cheapest console on the market, but it packs a fair old punch where horsepower is concerned – and it's already got more third-party support than N64 ever had.

games™ believes that each of the consoles available today offers enough to warrant a purchase and suggests that, if you have the budget, you should in invest in all three. Of course, that's not really practical for most people, so read on and find out exactly how we view the strengths and weaknesses of each format…

GRAPHICS

Every hard-core gamer knows that good graphics don't always equate to a good game. However, advancements in technology can sometimes allow programmers and designers to introduce new gameplay elements that simply wouldn't have been possible previously. Take driving games, for example – before the introduction of 3D visuals there was none of the realism, clarity or subtlety on offer today.

Of course, the graphical differences between the three consoles available today are hardly the same as the jump from 2D to 3D. Each is capable of generating enough polygons to display a fairly believable 3D environment, after all. Even so, differences in the internal workings can create some very interesting results…

AN EYE FOR DETAIL

Being the oldest of the three, PS2 was always going to come out worse in this area. Despite Bump Mapping and other such special features being listed in the hardware specifications, severe memory limitations have made these luxuries nigh-on impossible to implement in the average game. These technical restrictions, combined with a lack of any sort of texture compression, make the majority of PS2 games look horribly bland compared to those on rival consoles. This has, however, been partially rectified since the introduction of Criterion's *Renderware* program a little over a year ago.

When it comes to GameCube and Xbox though, there isn't nearly such a big difference. Xbox graphics tend to be slightly sharper and the additional memory allows for a wider variation of textures and special effects to be displayed simultaneously. But the nVidia graphics chip has a tendency to make things appear a little grey and washed-out if developers aren't careful. There's also an occasional problem with sections of the screen refreshing at different rates, causing ugly lines to streak horizontally across the picture.

GameCube, on the other hand, suffers from no such problems – everything is solid, vibrant and colourful. It's also an incredibly easy machine to program for, which is good for developers but does mean that we may have already seen much of what the technology has to offer.

" A LOT OF PS2 GAMES LOOK VERY BLAND COMPARED TO THOSE ON RIVAL CONSOLES"

"XBOX LETS GAMERS SAVE ENTIRE MUSIC TRACKS ONTO THE INTERNAL HARD DRIVE"

SOUND

Sound usually comes second to graphics, but here at *games™* we appreciate just how much difference a good soundtrack can make. In the past, composers have had numerous boundaries restricting their creativity. Be it too few channels or not enough memory, sound producers have nearly always had to find ways of cutting down their programs to make them fit.

These days, of course, such difficulties aren't such an issue, so it seems a bit of a shame that videogame compositions generally aren't what they used to be. To compensate for this though, new technology has allowed for a few innovations; licensed soundtracks and surround sound being two areas that seem to be making progress at present. But which console has the edge?

AN EAR FOR MUSIC

In this category it's immediately clear that Xbox offers a far more comprehensive range of functions than either of its rivals. PS2's lack of memory lets it down once more – although the console supports Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound, not a single game offers the feature during play. Nintendo hasn't even included the feature in its hardware at all, instead going for the lower-end option of Pro-Logic II.

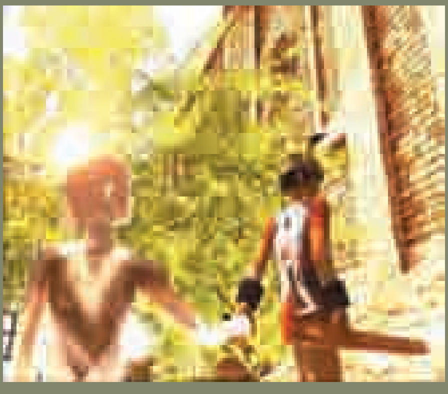
Many would argue that Dolby Digital 5.1 doesn't make a huge difference, but once you've sampled the delights of *Halo* through a decent home cinema system, your perception will be changed forever. In fact pretty much every Xbox game supports the feature – even those titles ported across from PS2 tend to be upgraded. And the extra functions don't stop there. While both PS2 and Xbox offer users the option of playing music CDs on their consoles, Xbox goes a step further by allowing them to save entire music tracks onto the internal hard drive. These can then be selected and played back in-game on many Xbox titles, giving you the chance to tailor soundtracks to your own taste. Creating your own soundtrack can make a good game great.

Aside from one or two other slight differences, all three consoles are of a fairly similar standard though. Sampling rates aren't an issue any more and, although both Xbox and GameCube offer a larger number of sound channels than PS2, the difference isn't noticeable in-game.

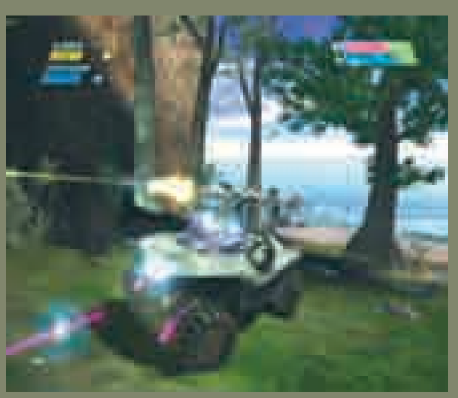
BEST AESTHETICS: IT'S LIKE A PIXELATED BEAUTY PAGEANT…



■ While innovation and overall finish may be an issue with Rare's *StarFox Adventures*, the quality of the visuals and sound simply can't be disputed. Dynamic lighting, fur-shading, shadow-casting… it's all here and it looks lovely.



■ A triumph of art and imagination – that's the only way to describe Sony's *Ico*. Rays of golden sunlight burn away detail and cast shadows over sprawling cliffs and castle walls, while the sound of seagulls echoes in the skies above. Stunning.



■ It's almost unbelievable to think that *Halo* was a launch game on Xbox. Just about every visual effect imaginable is used in abundance and almost 11,000 voice samples and sound effects are featured in Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound.

GAMES

Everyone knows that good games make a console popular – or at least that was the theory until SEGA's Dreamcast came along. Despite many innovative titles, Dreamcast failed to get noticed by the mass-market, although that probably had more to do with the company's status than anything else. Of course, that status is on the mend now that SEGA has given up the hardware war and started focusing solely on software. The big question now is whether the market is large enough to cater for three different hardware platforms currently available.

Nintendo has years of experience in creating top-quality games, but then so did SEGA. Sony has spent the past few years building up its reputation as a console manufacturer, but has never had to deal with a competitor as large as Microsoft. With such stiff competition it's going to be the quality of the software that separates the big three.

PRESS MY BUTTONS

The PlayStation2 has by far the biggest quantity of games, but they say that biggest isn't always best and that's certainly true here. The problem is that, while there are some real gems such as *Ico* and *Grand Theft Auto*, the PS2 line-up is littered with sub-standard products. On the plus side, the large number of titles means that there's something for everyone as well as a range of platinum games priced at £19.99.

Nintendo's line-up is perhaps the most perplexing at the moment, as the company's in-house produce seems to be all over the place. There was a time when almost everything that came out of Nintendo's Japanese headquarters was Triple-A quality. Now, however, titles such as *Luigi's Mansion* and the uninspired follow-ups to *Wave Race* and *Smash Brothers* suggest that the company has lost a little of its magic. It's not all bad though – S*uper Mario Sunshine* approaches the excellence of Nintendo's last generation titles and *Super Monkey Ball* from SEGA is pure genius.

Perhaps the hardest line-up to judge is that of Xbox. After a fantastic launch, things seemed to have dried up. There have been far too many multi-format titles released on the machine – although, admittedly, many have Xbox-exclusive content too. But there's plenty on the way, and it does seem to be the format receiving the most original concepts – even if many of them are fundamentally flawed.

"NINTENDO'S GAMES LINE-UP IS PERPLEXING – IN-HOUSE PRODUCE SEEMS TO BE ALL OVER THE PLACE AT THE MOMENT"

"PS2 IS A TRICKY MACHINE TO PROGRAM FOR, WITH MANY FLAWED AND OUT-OF-DATE COMPONENTS"

THE FUTURE

At the moment you could buy any of the three consoles currently available and have a lot of fun with it. The big question is whether you'll still be having fun on it in a year's time. Could one of the big three could become the next Dreamcast? *games™* doesn't think so, but exactly how successful each will be is another question.

Certainly so far there's been no touching PS2. Despite aggressive pricing of Xbox and GameCube, and with both consoles offering better visuals and sound, PS2 is still the mass-market's favourite. But is this simply because it's a more established brand? Will GameCube and Xbox sales catch up?

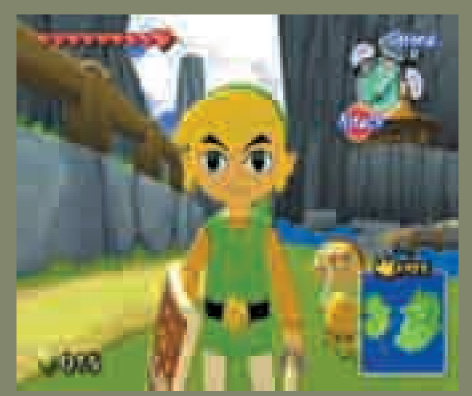
QUE SERA SERA

Okay, let's be honest – PS2 isn't going anywhere in a hurry. Sony's hold on the market is as strong as ever and, for the time being at least, it's still furthering its lead. However, we can't help feeling that we've seen the best of what PS2 has to offer. Being a tricky machine to program for, with many flawed and dated components, it's really showing its age from a technical standpoint. There will, of course, be the introduction of online gaming over the next year, though it's likely to cost a fair few bob to get the necessary upgrades. Besides, reports from America would suggest that the service has been less than stunning so far.

If it's online gaming you're after, then the Xbox Live facility is certainly looking like the best option. Microsoft has built a closed broadband infrastructure specifically for use with Xbox and, indeed, its future consoles. For £45 you get a year's subscription, a Communicator headset (everything is done with your voice, rather than typing), and two free games. Many companies have agreed to include Live support in their games – be it for downloading extra content and/or full online multiplayer goodness, though the fact that broadband still hasn't reached many parts of the UK could mean that consumer support is slow to start.

In contrast to Microsoft's bold online plans, Nintendo has decided to take a different approach to the subject. While online gaming is certainly part of the company's strategy for 2003, it's relying much more on quality titles to get noticed. And with games such as *Zelda* and *F-Zero* on the way, it's a strategy that might just pay off.

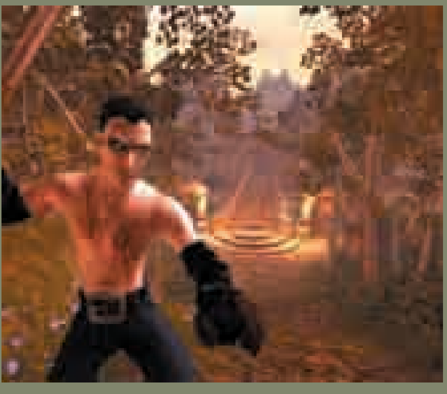
SOON PLAYING: COMING TO A CONSOLE NEAR YOU…



Whether you like the new-look visuals or not, it's hard to imagine that this will be anything other than stunning. Judging by the popularity of the past titles in the series, this should be one of the few GameCube highlights for the first half of 2003.



No matter what happens elsewhere in the industry, you know that Sony's always going to deliver the casual gamer's basic needs. *FIFA*, *Gran Turismo*, *Tekken* and, of course, *Tomb Raider*. It's hardly an innovative approach, but it does the trick.



With a heavy focus on broadband and online gaming, the future of Xbox should be very interesting indeed. Plus, there are a few innovative titles coming, such as *Fable*, which develops the main character and adventure around the decisions you make.

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

PRICE: £129.99



Central Processing Unit
- IBM Gekko (Custom PowerPC)
- 485 MHz

Graphics Processing Unit
- ATI Flipper
- 162 MHz
- 33 million polygons per second (peak)

Special Effects
- Point, Bilinear, Trilinear, Anisotropic Mip-Map Filtering
- Perspective-Correct Texture Mapping
- Bump Mapping
- Environment Mapping
- 24-Bit Z-Buffer
- S3TC Texture Compression
- Sub-Pixel Anti-Aliasing

Sound Processing Unit
- Custom Macronix 16-Bit DSP
- 81 MHz
- 64 Sound Channels
- Dolby Pro-Logic II Support

Main Memory
- 24 Megabytes plus 16 Megabytes Auxiliary Memory

Games Storage
- 3-Inch Optical Disc (1.5 Gigabytes)

Other features
- High-Speed Port
- 2 Serial Ports
- HDTV Support

games™ AWARDS
- Cutest design
- Most underrated hardware
- Most cutesy games
- Most upgradeable
- Biggest fanboy following
- Most overrated control pad
- Most compact
- Most vibrant graphics
- Best boot-up sequence
- Cheapest hardware

SONY PLAYSTATION2

PRICE: £169.99



Central Processing Unit
- Emotion Engine (Sony)
- 294.912 MHz

Graphics Processing Unit
- Graphics Synthesizer (Sony)
- 147.456 MHz
- 75 million polygons per second (peak)

Special Effects
- Point, Bilinear, Trilinear, Anisotropic Mip-Map Filtering
- Perspective-Correct Texture Mapping
- Bump Mapping
- Environment Mapping
- 32-Bit Z-Buffer

Sound Processing Unit
- 48 Sound Channels
- Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround Sound Support

Main Memory
- 32 Megabytes RAMBUS DRAM

Games Storage
- DVD-5 (4.7 Gigabytes)

Other features
- DVD Playback
- I/O 33.8688 MHz Processor (PSone CPU for backwards compatibility)
- 2 Universal Serial Bus Ports
- I-Link Port
- Optical Out
- HDTV Support

games™ AWARDS
- Most established
- Most games
- Most poor quality games
- Most likely to still be selling in five years
- Most overrated hardware
- Most publicized
- Noisiest fan
- Where are the textures?
- Longest loading times
- Cheapest games

MICROSOFT XBOX

PRICE: £159.99 (INCLUDING SEGA GT 2002 AND JET SET RADIO FUTURE)



Central Processing Unit
- Modified Intel Pentium III
- 733 MHz

Graphics Processing Unit
- nVidia XGPU
- 250 MHz
- 125 million polygons per second (peak)

Special Effects
- Point, Bilinear, Trilinear, Anisotropic Mip-Map Filtering
- Perspective-Correct Texture Mapping
- DotProduct3 Bump Mapping
- Environment Mapping
- Cubic Environment Mapping
- Volumetric Textures
- S3TC Texture Compression
- Full Scene Anti-Aliasing
- Programmable Pixel and Vertex Shading Processors

Sound Processing Unit
- nVidia MCPX
- 200 MHz
- 256 Sound Channels
- Dolby Digital 5.1

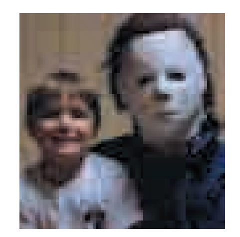
Main Memory
- 64 Megabytes DDR SDRAM

Games Storage
- DVD-9 (8.54 Gigabytes)

Other features
- Internal 8-Gigabyte Hard Drive
- DVD Playback
- Ethernet Port
- 4 USB Ports
- HDTV Support

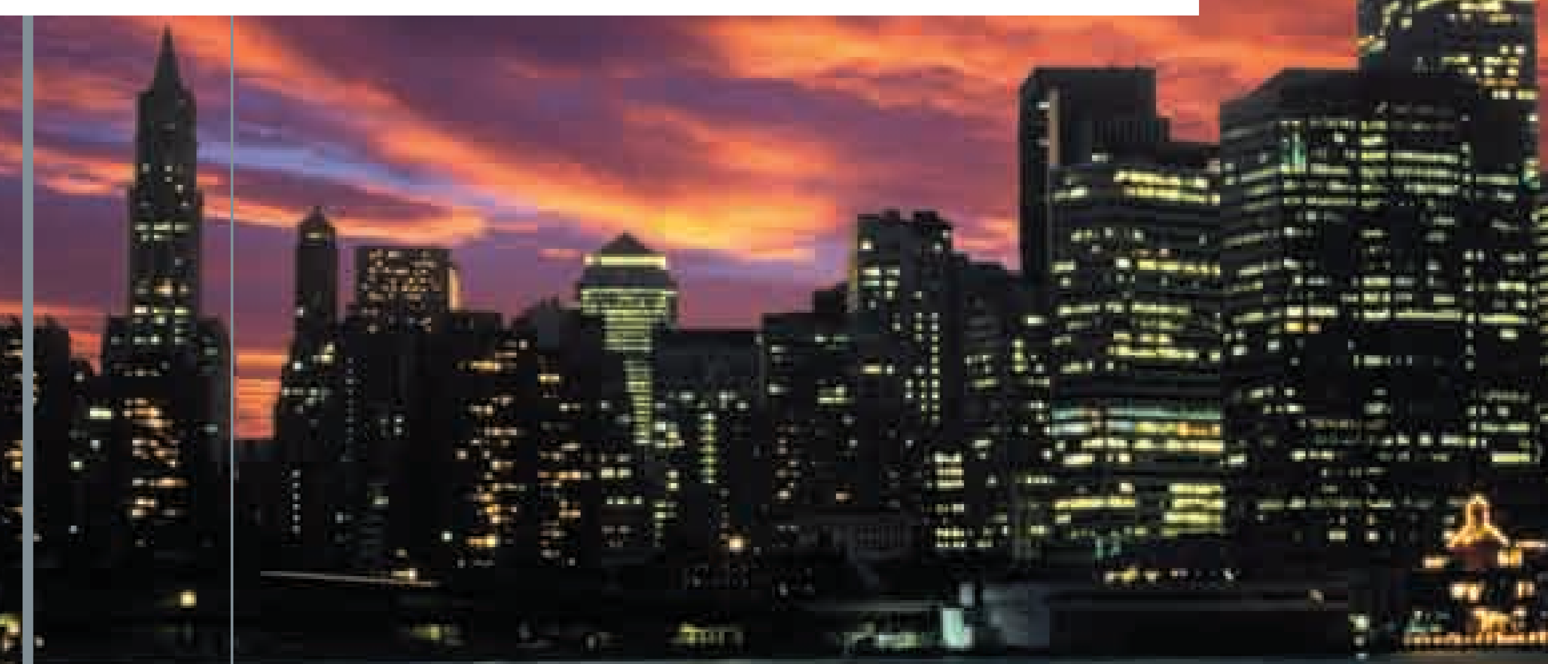
games™ AWARDS
- Most potential
- Best online support
- Most innovative exclusives
- Most unattractive hardware
- Best value for money
- Too many PS2 ports
- Best sound
- Sharpest graphics
- Worst boot-up sequence
- Too much green
- Most expensive games





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOOD EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE



"THE GAMER LIVES A BETTER LIFE IN THE STATES: GETTING FAT ON CHEAP BIG-SCREEN TVs AND GRABBING AFFORDABLE

You know, I don't believe I'll ever tire of garrotting that Geisha and then carefully posing her slight body on the bed – this leg here, now that arm there – in mock slumber… although if I can smuggle the fireaxe in to the dojo, perhaps I'll move on. I'm speaking of *Hitman 2*, certainly the most detailed example of human execution entertainment available this side of your grubby, third-generation *Faces Of Death* bootleg. But is it worth being 3,500 miles away from the Queen, elevenses, Wimbledon and Nigella Lawson to enjoy the simple pleasures of Eidos's contract killing simulator a few days before you (yes, you) with your stiff bowler hat and your incessant sipping of hot tea? Well, yes. The Queen only ever bored me on TV and Mrs Shape has got Nigella's book here for my frequent inspection. Besides, life holds many bonuses for the gamer living in the United States.

As with movies, lead times can be anywhere from four days (our games come out on Tuesdays here) to about a year. It's goodbye (and good riddance) to 50Hz, heavy-handed PAL conversions, black borders and all that. Prices leave less of a bitter aftertaste too. Fifty dollars is standard across the board, which is only a few pennies over £32 depending on how many wars Gee Dubya has cooking. Everyone's got cable too, so broadband is everywhere, making connection to the PS2 and Xbox networks easier and cheaper than it will ever be in creaky old Britain with its tangle of feeble copper wire. This has proven especially important with *SOCOM: US Navy Seals* (the one with the geeky headset) and its elitist 'broadband only' stipulation, freezing out anyone with old phoneline modems.

The gamer lives a better life in the United States: getting fat on irresistible treats, playing on cheaply available big screen TVs and grabbing affordable software before most other territories. But things aren't perfect. For a start, there's the media hysteria. You probably heard something about a sniper who shot an unfathomable number of people around the Washington DC area. For me, the worst part wasn't that at least three former colleagues felt it necessary to accuse me of these crimes (my arrival on the East Coast coinciding with the killing spree). Nor was it that my next door neighbour chose the period of paranoia in the middle of the manhunt to show me his civilian M-16 with mounted scope, identical to that shown on TV by police appealing for tip-offs. The worst part was an idiotic woman on CNN – an investigative 'reporter' composed entirely of lipstick and hairspray – who ran two segments proposing a link between videogames and the sniper attacks. "This game is *Cobra Strike*," she yelled over footage of something that looked for all the world like *Counter-Strike*, "which teaches people everything they'd need to know to become a skilled marksman." Then, with her best tilting of the head and an oh-so-concerned squinting of the eyes, she asked, "Is it possible the Beltway Sniper could have honed his skills on this type of videogame?" No honey, it's not – it's probably



IRRESISTIBLE TREATS, PLAYING ON SOFTWARE BEFORE OTHER COUNTRIES."

a crazy man, sleeping in his car, who bears a grudge, possibly ex-military. Concerning the first note from the sniper (the words "Dear Policeman, I am God" scribbled on a tarot card), she poked a few more holes in her leaky theory bucket. "God Mode," she told the nation, "is a state people enter when they play these games and they're doing really well, so 'I am God' is something these people say quite often". Talk about stretching a point. Of course, the alleged sniper has been caught and, it turns out, was a crazy man, sleeping in his car, who bears a grudge, ex-military. Celebrations all round then – except for videogames, needlessly dragged through the gutter once again.

Adjusting to an over-the-top sensibility is part of the living-in-America package. But I actually find it sort of comforting that a phonecall could have my friendly not-the-sniper neighbour over with his assault rifle within seconds. Though I'm not entirely sure I'm happy about the security guard at my local Gap packing a Glock 17. Guards in Britain don't even carry pepper spray; this dissatisfied gent in his fifties hangs on his belt the power to kill 15 people. What, exactly, is Bert authorised to do should I pull a Winona and forget to pay for my khakis? I don't intend to find out.

Until we meet in your house on a stormy night...



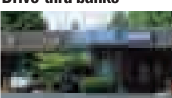
MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Cadbury's Cream Eggs



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Drive-thru banks



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

NUTTER BUTTER

Five-inch-long cookie, sold singly, moulded into the familiar shape of a peanut shell. Peanut butter filling. Delicious, nutritious.





USA MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
2	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Multi
3	Madden NFL 2003	EA	Multi
4	Kingdom Hearts	Squaresoft	PS2
5	Lord Of The Rings: Two Towers	EA	Multi
6	Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	GC
7	Socom: U.S. Navy Seals	EA	PS2
8	Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	EA	Multi
9	Tekken 4	EA	PS2
10	StarFox Adventures	Nintendo	GC

■ It's going to do big business over here so it's no surprise to see *GTA: Vice City* at the top of the US charts. It'll be the Bryan Adams of gaming…





WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TOMO OHNO *THIS MONTH

"REALISTIC FANTASY GAMES HAVE AN ALLURE TO AN OLDER GENERATION WHO AREN'T A MAJORITY IN THE CURRENT GAMING SCENE."

Realistic games are 'in' at the moment. Train-driving simulators now come with real scenery, sound and announcements like 'mind the gap'. Bulldozer simulators come with controllers that look like the real thing. And the biggest hit of this summer was *My Summer Holiday* – the adventures of a ten-year-old boy as he spends his summer at his grandparents' house, meeting new friends and venturing around villages… nothing more, nothing less. This game and titles like it are categorised as 'Nostalgia' games.

However, if games are meant to be about fantasy (speeding, shooting, fighting and killing – all things you cannot or should not do in the real world), then how do the ones above become so popular? Driving a train, manoeuvring a digger, being a lawyer, dating high-school girls… rather than being fantasy, these are all things set in real life. Or are they? In truth, not many people get to drive a train (even though they ride them every day) or work a bulldozer, while very few would have had high school experiences that they didn't regret. Comparisons between reality and fantasy might be hard, but imagination can be more realistic and intimate when you have experiences on which to form a foundation.

Like the famous dry rock garden in Kyoto where sand and rock represent oceans and islands (showing the beauty of nature without the aid of a single tree), imagination seems to hold the key. Adrenalin-gushing experiences are popular in Japan as well, but many more people find joy in their personal, intimate imagination.

As development costs rapidly increase, publishers need higher sales per title which means exporting the product overseas. The easiest way to achieve this successfully is to develop 'global' titles, but this economy-driven method tends to sacrifice the joys of the cultural side – in the same way that finding a McDonalds, Starbucks or Gap in every city you travel through is culturally frightening (although they do come in handy sometimes).

They might look geeky, but the truth is that these realistic fantasy games have an allure to an older generation who aren't a majority in the current gaming scene. I don't think that the creators of such games had intentions to expand games into grown-up entertainment… rather, they simply made what they believe to be fun.

As an inhabitant of a small corner of the games industry, I really hope that ideas with pure flair have the opportunity to be developed during this difficult time in the market. After all, enjoyment comes with variety – you can't eat sushi every day, so you might have kebab and chips once in a while; Spielberg and Tarantino are fun, but so are Kurosawa and Tarkovsky.

Diversity BANZAI!

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON ONE: DOWN THE PUB

Nihongo o hanashimasho…	Let's speak Japanese…
Biru demo nomimasho ka?	Shall we have a beer?
Kanpai!	Cheers!
Itete… (atama o osaeru)	Owwww… (holding head)
Yube wa zuibun nonda desho?	You had quite a lot last night, didn't you?

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

You might not believe it, but software sales in the Japanese games market actually decreased last year while sales across American and European markets grew. Because of this, many Japanese developers and publishers are keen to deploy their business globally and attract a wider audience rather than producing games specifically for the Japanese market. However, there are still quite a few 'Japan specific' titles as well. Here's a sample of the weekly Famitsu Top 30 list (week ending 11 November) so you can get some idea of the current trends in the Far East:

NO. 4: MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE [EA, PS2]

It's quite rare to see 'Yo Gei' (Japanese for 'Western game') this high in the chart – unfortunately, Yo Gei have quite a negative reputation. This week though, we have both this and *StarFox Adventures* (at No.13) in the chart. Many developers I know have told me that Yo Gei aren't very good, even though most of them haven't played them at all. Could these games finally change the attitude towards Yo Gei?

NO. 6: GYAKUTEN SAIBAN 2 (WINNING LAW SUIT) [CAPCOM, GBA]

NO. 7: TANTEI INNOCENT BLACK (DETECTIVE INNOCENT BLACK [WORKJAM, PS2]

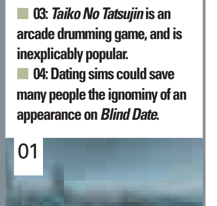
These games are very similar, which is why I put them together. The first is a court room drama – you select the right witnesses, evidence and tactics to win the case – while the second is a detective game where searching for clues and asking the right questions can help solve the crime. Both games are sequels and have built up quite a loyal following (hence why they're doing so well). As becoming a lawyer or detective is something that most people won't do, they are both fantasy games in some respect.

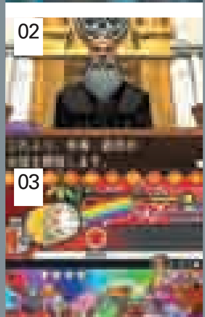
NO. 21: LOVE ADVENTURE GLASS FOREST [D3, PS2]

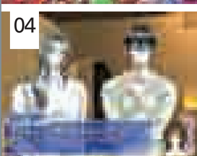
Yes, it's another dating simulation – except this one is the female version (the male version doesn't feature in the chart). As you'd expect, you play a girl who sets out to meet and fall in love with Mr Right. Oddly enough, it seems that the majority of buyers are not juveniles wanting to practice, but grown-ups trying to reconstruct the good old days (virtually, of course). Could this have some connection with the low birth rate in Japan today…?

As a side-point, it's interesting to look at the performances of the different consoles in the Japanese Console Top 20. Out of the 20 titles, there are ten Game Boy Advance games, five PlayStation 2 titles, two PSone games, two GameCube games and a single Dreamcast title. Strangely enough, the Xbox doesn't feature at all… in fact, it's not even in the Top 30. Perhaps I should be looking in the PC Games

01: *Medal of Honor: Frontline* is near the top of the gaming heap in Japan this month.
02: Legal sims are big business – and cheaper than a real visit to court.
03: *Taiko No Tatsujin* is an arcade drumming game, and is inexplicably popular.
04: Dating sims could save many people the ignominy of an appearance on *Blind Date*.


01


02
03


04

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Toruneko's Grand Adventure 3	Enix	PS2
2	From TV Animation: One Piece Treasure Battle	Bandai	GameCube
3	Final Fantasy	Square	PSone
4	Final Fantasy II	Square	PSone
5	Kirby Star: Fountain Of Dream	Nintendo	GBA
6	Ultraman Fighting Evolution 2	Banpresto	PS2
7	Final Fantasy I & II Premium Pack	Square	PSone
8	Tales Of The World: Nirikiri Dungeon 2	Namco	GBA
9	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	EA Square	Multiformat
10	Gundam Wing: The Battle Master	Bandai	PSone

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 10, Week ending 03/11/02)



games™ THE PLAYERS

THEY SAY THE TINIEST ACORNS CAN PRODUCE THE MIGHTIEST OAKS… THE FIRST CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER GAME NEARLY DIDN'T GET PUBLISHED; THE LATEST INSTALMENT SOLD IN RECORD-BREAKING QUANTITIES. SPORTS INTERACTIVE HAS NOW GOT A REPUTATION FOR DEVELOPING THE BEST FOOTBALL MANAGEMENT GAMES ON THE MARKET. MANAGING DIRECTOR MILES JACOBSEN AND HEAD PROGRAMMER MARC VAUGHAN EXPLAIN HOW, AND WHY, THEY KEEP GETTING BETTER.

"WE AREN'T STRIVING TO MAKE A GAME BETTER THAN OUR COMPETITORS – WE'RE TRYING TO MAKE GAMES THAT ARE BETTER AND MORE ACCURATE THAN OUR LAST ONE."

MILES JACOBSEN

MILES JACOBSEN

SPORTS INTERACTIVE

For any games developer, establishing a reputation as the market leader in a particular gaming niche is an achievement that shouldn't go unnoticed. However, when a developer releases a game that creates its own niche, you know you're dealing with a particularly gifted team of individuals. Sports Interactive is just such a team.

Back in the early nineties, brothers Paul and Oliver Collyer wrote a text-based football management game in their spare time, mainly for their own enjoyment. As an afterthought, they tried to get it published, only for a number of companies to turn down the opportunity to sign *Championship Manager*. Eventually, a firm called Domark (now known as Eidos) decided to give the pair a shot and the rest, as they say, is history. From humble beginnings, the most recent *Championship Manager* game became the fastest-selling PC title of all time, shifting a staggering 103,000 copies in its first weekend on sale.

Sports Interactive's managing director, Miles Jacobsen, attributes the company's success to its fluidity and openness. Head programmer Marc Vaughan agrees, and feels that the relatively small size of the team is also a contributing factor: "Once you get beyond a 'critical size' for a team, you lose some of the immediacy," he says.

Anyone and everyone can come up with ideas to include in the games, from company co-founders Paul and Oliver right down to the games testers and fans. Obviously, new ideas are an absolute must because the company's latest project, *Championship Manager 4*, is not just an update of a previous version of the game, but a full rewrite from the ground up.

It says a lot about Sports Interactive that they are not content to keep churning out updates. In the words of Jacobsen: "We aren't striving to make a game better than our competitors – we're trying to make games that are better and more accurate than our last one". It's a sentiment echoed by Vaughan, who admits that by the time the 2001 / 2002 add-on was released "the *CM3* engine was starting to limit what could be done in the game, and we want to be pushing the game forward as much as possible".

It's this refusal to succumb to arrogance that marks SI out as a company that will dominate the football management genre for years to come. Although in the early days, some influences were taken from the top football titles of the time – *Football Manager* and *Director of Football* are two that Jacobsen cites as particular examples – nowadays, the team worry less about what their rivals are doing and more about what their fans are asking for.

The firm's official website (www.sigames.com) is a valuable tool for keeping in touch with what those who play the game would like to see included in future versions. This effectively helps the development team ensure that what the fans want, the fans get. As Jacobsen himself says: "What better feedback can you possibly get than constructive criticism from the people who go into shops and buy the game?"

It is to meet the demands of the game's fans that *CM4* will include a top-down match engine for the first time. Vaughan and Jacobsen are not worried it will change the game too much, and feel it strikes a happy medium.

"We've always been very anti-3D match engines for management games, but we aren't going to rule anything out," says Jacobsen, when explaining the decision not to go for a 3D engine this time around. "They tend to destroy the realism, but also the imagination aspect of the game. Part of the beauty of *CM* is that you get lost in the imagination of it all, and in that way it is really a role-playing game," he says.

"The 2D view gives the user a better indication of the actual flow and positioning of the players involved in the match without interfering with their mind's eye view of what is happening," adds Vaughan, clearly excited by this new development in the series.

Vaughan and Jacobsen's enthusiasm is matched by the game's fans – when the first batch of screenshots were posted on the official site recently, the servers crashed almost immediately as millions of people tried to see them.

And it looks like Sports Interactive's plans don't stop there. The last year has seen the release of *Championship Manager Quiz* and *Eastside Hockey Manager* in the USA, as one would expect from a company that seems incapable of resting on its laurels. When asked about future expansion plans, Jacobsen simply advises people to "watch this space". With Sports Interactive's impressive track record so far, only a fool would ignore him…

COMMUNITY

EACH MONTH, GAMES™ GOES BEHIND THE SCENES WITH A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. FOR OUR FIRST OUTING WE VISITED THE ARTOON TEAM IN YOKOHAMA, JAPAN.



Artoon is based in Yokohama, less than 20 miles from Tokyo. Yokohama is Japan's second biggest city.

ARTOON

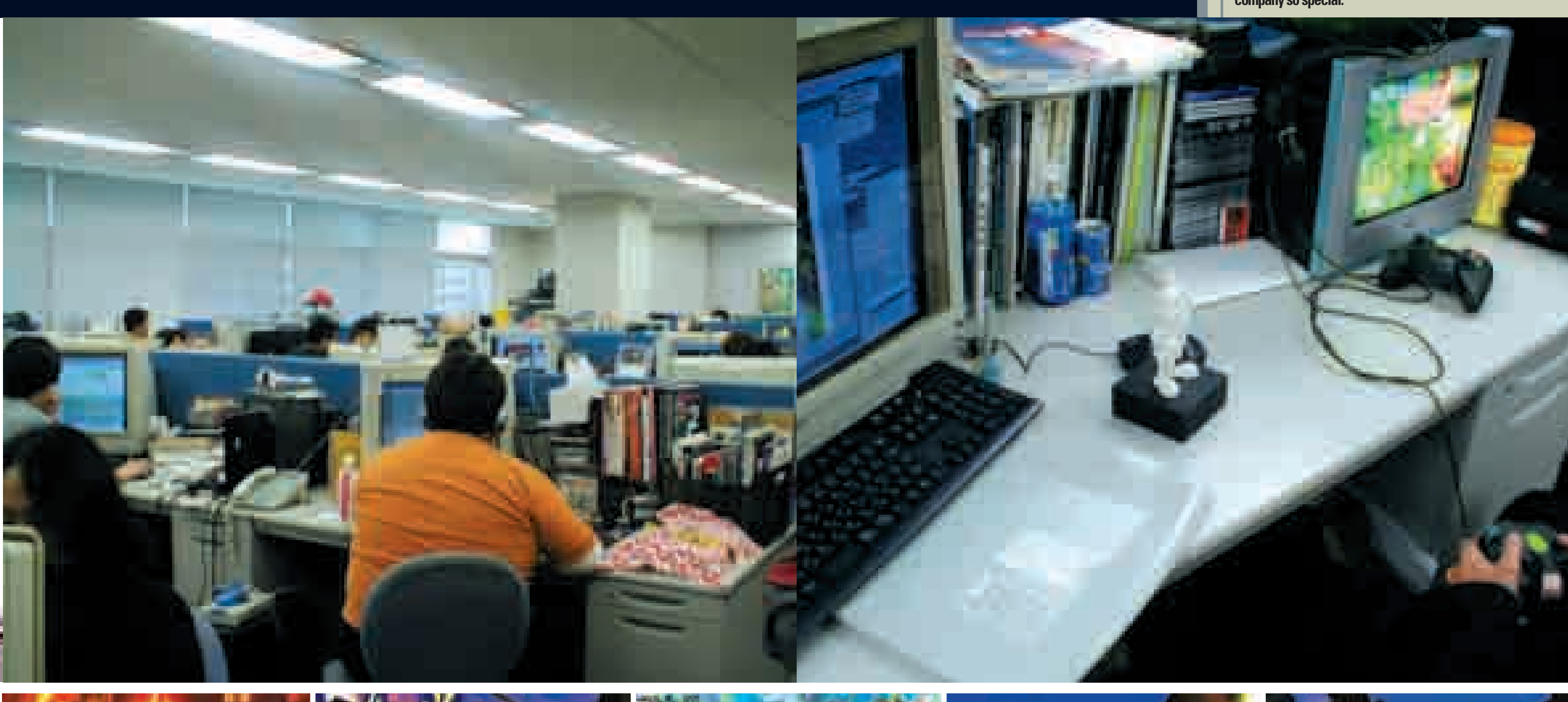
MEET THE TEAM RESPONSIBLE FOR PINOBEE AND BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER AS WE TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THEIR WORK…

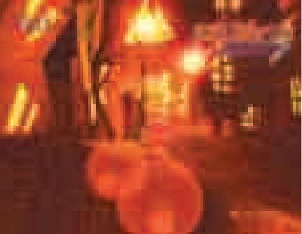
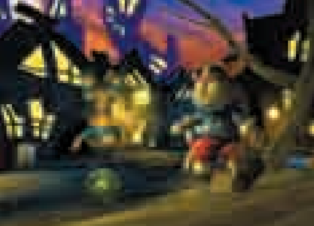
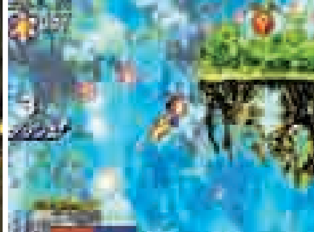
Starting a new company from scratch is never easy – especially at a time when the market your product is aimed at is going through something of a crisis period. But that was the task that faced Yoji Ishii when he left SEGA back in 1999. Of course, being senior director of Research and Development at SEGA of Japan must have been tough – the company's reputation was in tatters following disastrous sales of the Saturn, 32X and Mega CD.

After leaving SEGA, Ishii-san spent a few months looking into the possibility of starting up his own company and eventually established Artoon in Yokohama, Japan, in August '99. A talented team of 40 people were recruited, many of whom had played a substantial role in the creation of some of SEGA's most loved titles, including *Sonic The Hedgehog* and *Panzer Dragoon*. One of the most influential was director and game designer Naoto Ohshima, who not only led the design of *Sonic Adventure*, but had spent time at Koei, where he worked on the PS2 hit *Kessen*. It was with this varied team that Ishii-san hoped to realize his dream of creating unique new action games.

At that time, the PSone market was becoming increasingly stagnant all around the world, with far too many thoughtless follow-ups and very little innovation. Dreamcast had been on sale in Japan for nine months and, although it was fairly popular with gamers, it was already clear that the mass-market was waiting for the arrival of PS2. This left Artoon with the difficult task of choosing which format to create its first games for. Sony wasn't letting PS2 development kits

The Artoon offices are much like any other – it's what comes out of them that makes the company so special.





Artoon certainly lives up to its name – both of its best-known titles are incredibly artistic representations of cartoon worlds. With influences such as Salvador Dali, Artoon already has a certain flavour to its imagery. It's a style that reminds us of Tim Burton's unsettling creations in *Beetlejuice* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

out to smaller companies and there was a good chance that the PSone and Dreamcast markets would have dried up in the time that it would take to create a single title. Backed into a corner, the company took the only route it could see and began creating games for mobile phones and Game Boy Advance.

Even though Artoon employed many creative individuals, its first batch of games went relatively unnoticed – mainly because mobile phone gaming was still in its infancy. It wasn't until the launch of GBA the following year that the company's creations were finally accepted around the world. But even then Artoon didn't get the recognition it deserved. Its first title, *Pinobee*, was among the launch line-up of GBA games and performed fairly well at retail thanks to its vibrant visuals and classic platform design. However, it was published by Hudson in the West and promoted as a Hudson product, with Artoon barely getting a mention. But, while the company may not have received the recognition it would have liked for its first major release, it had made a wedge of cash with which to fund its next project. Sadly, its follow-up titles didn't perform anywhere near as well as *Pinobee* and were only released in Japan; *GhostVibration* on PS2 and *GhostTrap* on GBA blended the gameplay style of *Resident Evil* with a supernatural theme, much like Tecmo's *Project Zero* on PS2. As both companies' games were released at a similar time, it's unclear which one came up with the idea first.

After *Pinobee*, it looked as if Artoon would be a one-hit-wonder and drift into obscurity. However, it just so happened that a certain American company had a few billion yen to spend on marketing its new console in Japan. For Microsoft, Artoon was just what it was looking for – a small, relatively unknown Japanese company with talented employees and plenty of good ideas. Of course, the deal was just as beneficial to Artoon, as the company would now get its biggest chance yet to make a name for itself, as well as receiving a healthy cash bonus. Even so, Artoon doubted Microsoft's ability to make a go of its new venture in Japan. "We asked Microsoft what kind of games it wanted", reveals Ishii-san. "We wanted to make a title that would appeal to the American market". And so after many discussions between the two companies, it was agreed that Artoon would create a stylised action/adventure game that would be published under the Microsoft Game Studios name.

Of course, once the deal had been agreed and the foundations were in place, Artoon had the hardest part ahead of it – designing the game itself. "We wanted to make a character that suits Microsoft's image", comments Naoto Ohshima, director of the project. "We want Blinx to become the face of Xbox; we've done our best to make a character people will like". Sadly, *Blinx* hasn't been quite as well received as Artoon would have liked and it's the main character himself that seems to get the most criticism. It may be true that he's not exactly a revolutionary design, but the premise behind the character is a lot more thoughtful than you might think: "Cats are loved worldwide", Ohshima-san points out. "They have a mysterious charm about them. They can be there one minute and gone the next, which ties

"WE ASKED MICROSOFT WHAT KIND OF GAMES IT WANTED. WE WANTED TO APPEAL TO THE AMERICAN MARKET"

YOJI ISHII, ARTOON CEO

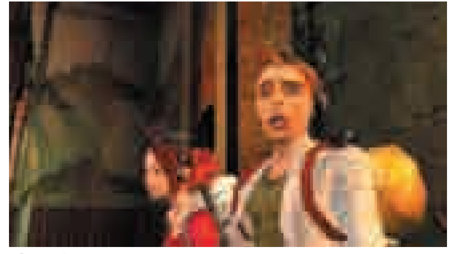


ONLY IN JAPAN

While *Pinobee* and *Blinx* are fairly well known in the West, other Artoon games have never made it to these shores…

GHOSTVIBRATION PS2 (2002)

Artoon's *GhostVibration* isn't dissimilar to Tecmo's *Project Zero (Fatal Frame)*, on PS2 and Xbox. But which one came first?



GHOSTTRAP GBA (2002)

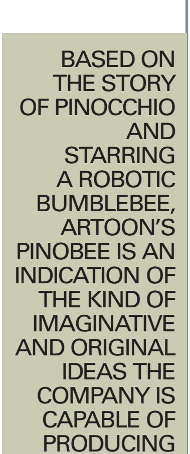
***GhostTrap* is basically the handheld version of *GhostVibration*. In terms of visuals this is definitely one of the better looking GBA games out there.**



MOBILE GAMES

While Artoon's *Ghost* titles could theoretically find an audience in the West, the company's mobile phone games are quite clearly aimed squarely at a Japanese audience.





BASED ON THE STORY OF PINOCCHIO AND STARRING A ROBOTIC BUMBLEBEE, ARTOON'S PINOBEE IS AN INDICATION OF THE KIND OF IMAGINATIVE AND ORIGINAL IDEAS THE COMPANY IS CAPABLE OF PRODUCING



BEE GOOD

When the Game Boy Advance launched, there weren't many original games available. The majority of Nintendo's own games were SNES or NES ports and, on the whole, the line-up wasn't particularly exciting. *Pinobee* wasn't exactly ingenious, but at least it was something new and original. It was also one of the more technically advanced pieces of software on offer, featuring pre-rendered characters in the style of *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES and even squeezing a few seconds-worth of full-motion-video out of Nintendo's handheld.

Before work began on the actual game, Artoon had to decide on a visual style and produced some very lovely concept art in the process. The comic book-esque piece shown below takes elements from the story of *Pinocchio* and has had a fabric texture applied to give the image a tactile appearance.





in with our theme of time travel". In fact, the time travel theme influenced the whole design of the game. Art director Masamichi Harada is a big fan of Salvador Dali and used his surrealist style as a basis for his work on *Blinx*. "We experimented by taking images of Venice and applying artistic techniques to them", he reveals. "We then used reversed daylight to create a strange atmosphere – the buildings are in sunlight, even though the sky is filled with stars – this gives the idea that time has warped."

Talking to the various members of the team, you get the impression that the development process of Artoon's titles is based on creativity, rather than business. Progress seems to be a case of trial and error with seemingly no set objectives prior to production. This is something that Wavemaster Studios' Tatsuya Kozaki had to come to terms with when producing the *Blinx* soundtrack. "At first I based the music on the beauty of the background graphics, but the team didn't like it," he confesses. "They felt it would be better if I focused on the main character and made it a little more cheerful and upbeat". By blending the styles of its previous work together (including *Rez* and *Nights Into Dreams.*), the studio was able to come up with a bizarre techno soundtrack with plenty of *Sonic*-style melodies.

It seems to us that Artoon still has some way to go before its output matches the quality of Japan's biggest developers. Even so, there's a level of creativity and enthusiasm not often seen in larger companies. "Development on the Xbox was more than we ever expected", admits Naoto Ohshima. "When we were working on the Dreamcast there would be a lot of shuffling between members of the team about the music, or the graphics, or some element taking up too much space. But on the Xbox, there was no such fighting as its structure means that the sound, graphics and programme memory are all in the same location. Give and take on the team was enhanced and we all really felt like we created the game together, as a team."

Now that *Blinx* is out of the way, Artoon is being coy about its next big project. *Blinx 2* isn't out of the question but such a thing would probably require Microsoft's backing and, as the first game has had a lukewarm reception, it's unclear whether either company would want to invest in a second attempt. But whatever Artoon decides to produce next is likely to be innovative and charming, even if it isn't perfect overall. We really hope that, with experience, the company's production quality will eventually rise to meet the imaginations of the individuals who work there.

WHAT NOT TO WEAR

Who's who at Artoon games

1 Yoji Ishii, Development Director & Artoon CEO (FRONT ROW, SECOND FROM RIGHT)

2 Naoto Ohshima, Blinx Director (FRONT ROW, SECOND FROM LEFT)

3 Nasamichi Harada, Art Director (FRONT ROW, ON THE RIGHT)

4 Tatsuya Kozaki, Sound Producer, Wavemaster (BACK ROW, LIVELY ORANGE HAIR)

Stop Press! Just as we we finishing writing the magazine, we received confirmation that Artoon is indeed working on Blinx 2, as well as an Xbox exclusive RPG.

RELEASE LISTS



Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb PC, PS2, Xbox
The original tomb raider returns in March

Ninja Gaiden Xbox
Can Tecmo's series still cut the mustard?

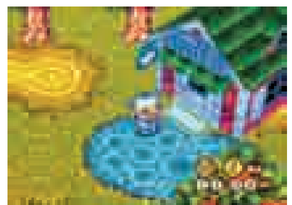
Soul Calibur 2 Arcade, GC, PS2, Xbox
Check out the arcade review on page 110



ANIMAL CROSSING

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo

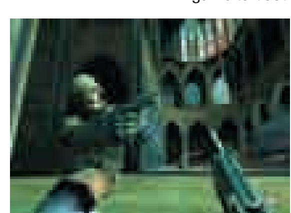
It may not be to everybody's taste, but *Animal Crossing* has kept us coming back for more on a daily basis. Forrest Gump famously said "Life is like a box of chocolates" and that couldn't be truer where *Animal Crossing* is concerned – you never do know what you're going to get next.



TIME SPLITTERS 2

Format: GameCube, PlayStation2, Xbox
Publisher: Eidos

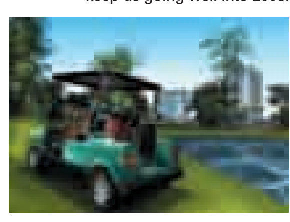
This has had the office split down the middle – is it as good as *Halo* or *GoldenEye*? Whatever your views on the subject there's no disputing that it's a stunning game that offers one of the best multiplayer experiences around and a fairly decent single player game to boot.



GTA: VICE CITY

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Rockstar

Everyone was hoping this would live up to the hype and it does. If there's one thing more enjoyable than driving around a city at high speeds, it's driving around a city at high speeds with Blondie and Michael Jackson blaring out of the stereo. We reckon this will keep us going well into 2003.



PLAYSTATION2



Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '02			
6 Dec	Alpine Racer 3	Sony	
6 Dec	Ape Escape 2	Sony	Wanted!
6 Dec	Defender	Midway	
6 Dec	Disney Golf	Electronic Arts	
6 Dec	Monopoly Party	Infogrames	
6 Dec	Star Wars: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	
6 Dec	The Simpsons Skateboarding	Electronic Arts	
6 Dec	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	Electronic Arts	
6 Dec	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	
13 Dec	The Getaway	Sony	
13 Dec	Shrek: Super Party	TDK	
TBC	Evolution Skateboarding	Konami	
TBC	Silent Scope 3	Konami	
JANUARY '03			
3 Jan '03	Battle Engine Aquila	Infogrames	
10 Jan	Sly Raccoon	Sony	Wanted!
17 Jan	Falcone: Into The Maelstrom	Virgin	
31 Jan	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
31 Jan	Treasure Planet	Sony	
TBC	Evil Dead: A Fistful Of Broomstick	THQ	
FEBRUARY '03			
7 Feb	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 Feb	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	Wanted!
14 Feb	The Sims	Electronic Arts	
14 Feb	Space Channel 5.2	SEGA	
14 Feb	Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	
21 Feb	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
21 Feb	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin	
28 Feb	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	
TBC	ATV: Off Road Fury 2	Sony	
TBC	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	Jurassic Park: Project Genesis	Vivendi	
TBC	Moto GP 3	Sony	
TBC	Rolling	Rage	
TBC	Shinobi	SEGA	Wanted!
MARCH '03			
7 March	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	Wanted!
7 March	Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Devil May Cry 2	Capcom	Wanted!
21 March	Soul Calibur 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted!
28 March	Indiana Jones: The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Wanted!
28 March	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
TBC	Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	
TBC	Dark Chronicle	Sony	
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	Lamborghini	Rage	
TBC	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi	
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Capcom	
TBC	Suikoden 3	Konami	
TBC	Tenchu 3: Wrath Of Haven	Activision	
TBC	True Crimes: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	
TBC	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	

GAMECUBE



Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '02			
6 Dec	Bomberman Generations	Vivendi	
6 Dec	Disney's Donald Duck: Who Is PK?	Ubi Soft	
6 Dec	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	
6 Dec	Monopoly Party	Infogrames	
6 Dec	Monster Jam: Maximum Destruction	Ubi Soft	
6 Dec	Nickelodeon Party Blast	Infogrames	
6 Dec	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	Electronic Arts	
13 Dec	Knockout Kings 2003	Electronic Arts	
13 Dec	The Sum Of All Fears	Ubi Soft	
JANUARY '03			
3 Jan	Blood Omen 2	Eidos	
31 Jan	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Evolution World	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	Wanted!
TBC	Star Wars Bounty Hunter	LucasArts	
FEBRUARY '03			
7 Feb	Rally Championship	SCi	
7 Feb	Outlaw Golf	TDK	
7 Feb	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 Feb	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	Wanted!
14 Feb	Robotech: Battlecry	TDK	
21 Feb	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
21 Feb	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin	
28 Feb	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	Wanted!
TBC	Defender	Midway	
TBC	Paris Dakar Rally 2	Acclaim	
TBC	Rolling	Rage	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Soul Calibur 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted!
28 March	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
TBC	1080° Avalanche	Nintendo	Wanted!
TBC	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	Powerpuff Girls: Shock Of Ages	Bam!	
TBC	Resident Evil 2	Capcom	
TBC	Resident Evil 3: Nemesis	Capcom	Wanted!
TBC	Super Monkey Ball 2	Infogrames	
TBC	True Crimes: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	

NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, please bear in mind that they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. Blame market forces. Blame the capricious whim of the publishers. But don't blame us, we tried really hard…

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES


Steel Battalion Xbox
An experience unlike any other, or so they say

ToeJam & Earl 3: Mission To Earth Xbox
Check out *games*™ issue 2 for the definitive review

The Legend Of Zelda GC
Watch out next issue for an update on the Japanese version

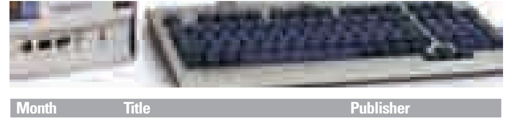
Splinter Cell PC
Check out the Xbox review on page 106

XBOX



Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '02			
6 Dec	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	
6 Dec	NBA: Inside Drive	Microsoft	
6 Dec	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	Electronic Arts	
13 Dec	Shrek: Super Party	TDK	
JANUARY '03			
3 Jan	Battle Engine Aquila	Infogrames	
3 Jan	The House Of The Dead 3	Infogrames	Wanted!
3 Jan	Panzer Dragoon Orta	Infogrames	Wanted!
17 Jan	Falcone: Into The Maelstrom	Virgin	
17 Jan	Robocop	Virgin	
31 Jan	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
31 Jan	Mercedes-Benz WorldRacing	TDK	
TBC	Evil Dead: A Fistful Of Broomstick	THQ	
FEBRUARY '03			
7 Feb	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 Feb	DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Microsoft	
14 Feb	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	Wanted!
21 Feb	Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	
21 Feb	Galleon: Islands Of Mystery	Virgin	
28 Feb	Return To Castle Wolfenstein	Activision	
TBC	Defender	Midway	
TBC	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	
TBC	Jurassic Park: Project Genesis	Vivendi	
TBC	Paris Dakar Rally 2	Acclaim	
TBC	Racing Evoluzione	Infogrames	
TBC	Rolling	Rage	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
7 March	Kung Fu Chaos	Microsoft	
7 March	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	
7 March	Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft	
7 March	Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc	Ubi Soft	
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
21 March	Soul Calibur 2	Electronic Arts	Wanted!
28 March	Brute Force	Microsoft	
28 March	Indiana Jones: The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Wanted!
28 March	Psychonauts	Microsoft	
28 March	SW: Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	
28 March	Teo Feng	Microsoft	
28 March	Tork	Microsoft	
28 March	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted!
TBC	Crimson Skies 3	Microsoft	
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
TBC	Lamborghini	Rage	
TBC	Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
TBC	Malice: Kat's Tale	Vivendi	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted!
TBC	Shenmue 2	SEGA	
TBC	Steel Battalion	Capcom	Wanted!
TBC	ToeJam & Earl 3	SEGA	
TBC	True Crimes: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	

PC



Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER '02			
6 Dec	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2003	Electronic Arts	
13 Dec	The Sims Online	Electronic Arts	
JANUARY '03			
31 Jan	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
31 Jan	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Vietcong	Take 2	
FEBRUARY '03			
7 Feb	Project IGI 2: Covert Strike	Codemasters	
14 Feb	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	
14 Feb	Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	
21 Feb	Command And Conquer Generals	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Defender	Midway	
TBC	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	NovaLogic	
TBC	Ghost Master	Empire	
TBC	NASCAR Racing 2003 Season	Vivendi	
TBC	Shadow Of Memories	Konami	
MARCH '03			
7 March	Beach Soccer	Wanado	
7 March	Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami Wanted	
7 March	Unreal 2: The Awakening	Infogrames	
14 March	Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
28 March	Indiana Jones: The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Wanted!
28 March	Star Wars Galaxies	LucasArts	Wanted!
28 March	XIII	Ubi Soft	

GBA

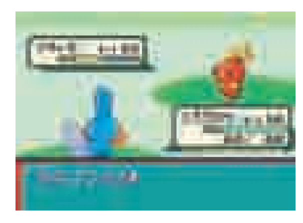


Month	Title	Publisher	
DECEMBER			
6 Dec	Defender	Midway	
6 Dec	Gauntlet: Dark Legacy	Midway	
6 Dec	Justice League: Injustice For All	Midway	
6 Dec	Worms Blast	Ubi Soft	
20 Dec	Robocop	Virgin	
Dec TBC	Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past	Nintendo	Wanted!
JANUARY			
31 Jan	Treasure Planet	Sony	
TBC	Bratz	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Crash Bandicoot 2: N-Tranced	Vivendi	
FEBRUARY			
7 Feb	Vexx	Acclaim	
14 Feb	Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	
TBC	Rolling	Rage	
MARCH			
7 March	Beach Soccer	Wanadoo	
TBC	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Wanted!

games™ ON THE HORIZON

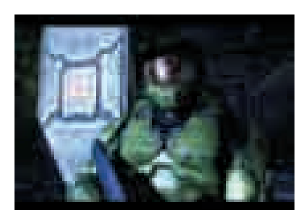
POKÉMON RUBY/ SAPHIRE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo
One hundred new Pokémon, four-way battles, fully animated characters… what more could a Pokéfan want? There's also a possibility that Nintendo will include some sort of connectivity with the rumoured GameCube version of the game, expected in late 2003.



HALO 2

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
It may be a predictable choice, but the truth is that we're looking forward to *Halo 2* as much as anybody. For fans of the original, *Halo 2* offers more of the same, but with the added bonus of being set on Earth. And there'll be support for Xbox Live, with the chance of an online co-operative mode.



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

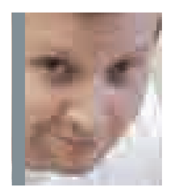
Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
We should be well into the Japanese version of Zelda by the time you read this. Of course, what we're really looking forward to is an English language version, which should available early next year. Nintendo hasn't confirmed a release date yet, but the first week of April is looking likely.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

THE NEWEST TECHNOLOGIES ARE GOING TO RESURRECT SOME OF THE OLDEST GAMES…



What's the first game you ever played? Was it *Pong*? *Space Invaders*? *Pac-Man*? *Defender*? Before you snort and turn back to *Vice City* or *Mario Sunshine*, there is a point to all this misty nostalgia. These types of games are coming back and they are promising to revolutionise the entire games industry.

Games technology is advancing at a huge rate. The latest consoles are staggering and have created some of the most incredible games ever seen. But the next big step in the games business might be made on technology that is only just capable of running the smallest and simplest games.

Gaming is still not a truly mainstream activity and many people would never, ever buy a games console, even if threatened at gunpoint. Mobile phones can't compete with *Halo* or *GTAIII*, but let's face it; they have the numbers. These devices can let hundreds of millions of boring and joyless people play and enjoy games. While they might be simple, old arcade titles played on a phone handset could bring more fans into the games industry than any other platform ever created.

In five years time, your mum could go from enjoying the odd game of *Pac-Man* on her phone, to kicking your butt at *Tekken IX*. Now there's a thought.

And old school games are not the end of the story. A lot of developers are already working on games that will have huge appeal to real gamers. Brand new concepts, massive multiplayer games and unique ways to use the phone's communication abilities mean that entirely new types of game are going to be coming your way in the very near future. Real games. And ringtones. Hurrah!

And it works both ways. Wait till you see *Snake* in 3D using powerful *Unreal* technology…

Brian Baglow
Indoctrimat PR



AS THE WAR RAGES ON, WE BRING YOU THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE FRONTLINE…

BUNDLES OF JOY

NO SIGN OF PRICE CUTS BUT THERE'S PACKAGE DEALS GALORE…



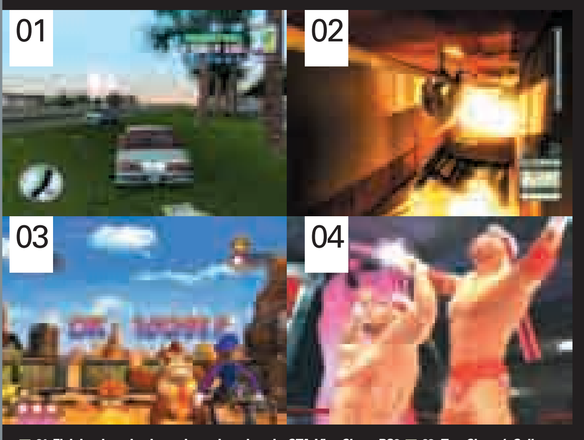
Despite an attractive package (snigger), Xbox could still lose out to Sony in the Christmas buying war.

As the yuletide period draws near, competition grows more and more fierce to get each of the consoles on as many Christmas lists as possible. The Xbox is receiving the most notable push – prospective buyers can now get the machine with *SEGA GT 2002* and *Jet Set Radio Future* for the same price as the standalone console, £159.99. These free games are likely to help significantly boost Microsoft's installed base and represent an aggressive move. With this as a standing bundle for the holiday period, many stores will also be running deals on top of this, much like they did with the PS2's limited *GT3* package. Nintendo looks to be riding on the strength of its *Super Mario Sunshine* bundle (console, game and Memory Card 59
at £179.99), as there has been no word of any price drop. The strong brand name should be enough to keep this pack popular despite the higher price.

The PlayStation2 is in a slightly different situation. Going into its third Christmas, this will be the first year when the machine will both have competition from others and be readily available. Strangely, the console is still the most expensive of the three despite being over two years old; clocking in at £169.99 for the console alone with no official bundle deals announced. Sony is obviously selling the machine on the name and the huge back-catalogue of quality titles. With the all-but-guaranteed Christmas number one seller (*Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*) as an exclusive title, the PS2 will probably be flying off the shelves even if it still has its original £300 price tag. Add to this the fact that Argos stores (among others) now offer all PS2 software at £29.99 or less and Sony may still reign supreme, even when its competitors

AND CHRISTMAS NUMBER ONE IS…

WE PREDICT THE BIG SELLERS GOING INTO NEXT YEAR



01: Eighties throwback murder and mayhem in *GTA: Vice City* on PS2 02: *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* should give plenty of gamers a stealth-laden Christmas 03: *Mario Party 4* will provide fun for all the family (surely a contradiction in terms?) 04: Scantily-clad lunkheads in *WWE Smackdown: Shut Your Mouth*

Don't even try to kid yourself, *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* will be Christmas number one provided, of course, stores receive enough stock. The battle for second place is now what matters and there are plenty of contenders – and with the likes of *Tomb Raider* and *Champ Manager 4* out of the running until after the New Year, there could be some surprises. Two strong favourites to claim high spots will be THQ's *WWE Smackdown: Shut Your Mouth* and EA's stack of *Harry Potter* games, while current multi-format titles such as *TimeSplitters 2* and *FIFA 2003* will undoubtedly stick around. PlayStation2 titles and multi-platform games clearly have the upper hand in terms of user base, but there are always the outside bets – *StarFox Adventures* and *Mario Party 4* should do the GameCube proud and *Splinter Cell* will be flying the flag for Microsoft's machine. All of these will sell like warmed-up cakes, but it would take a marketing miracle to knock Rockstar's crime romp from the top slot..

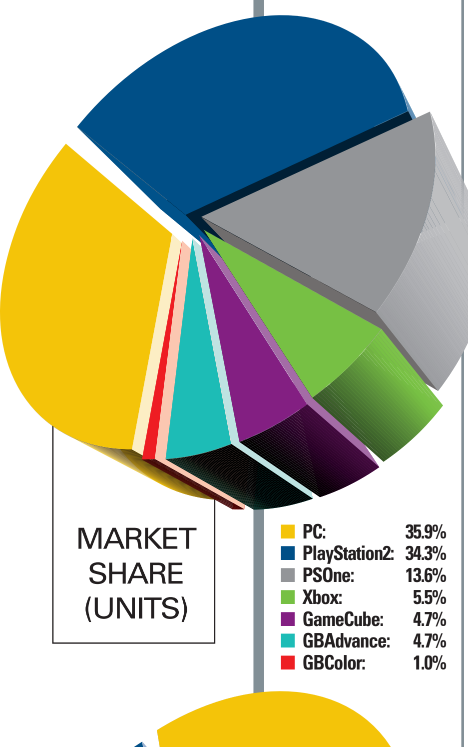
PIE IN THE SKY

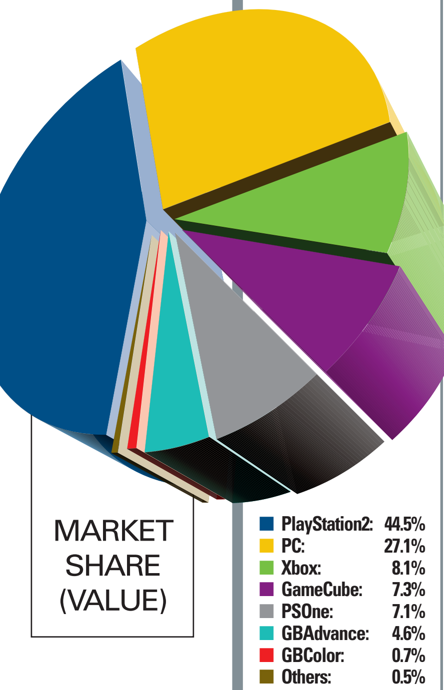
THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY LAID BARE.

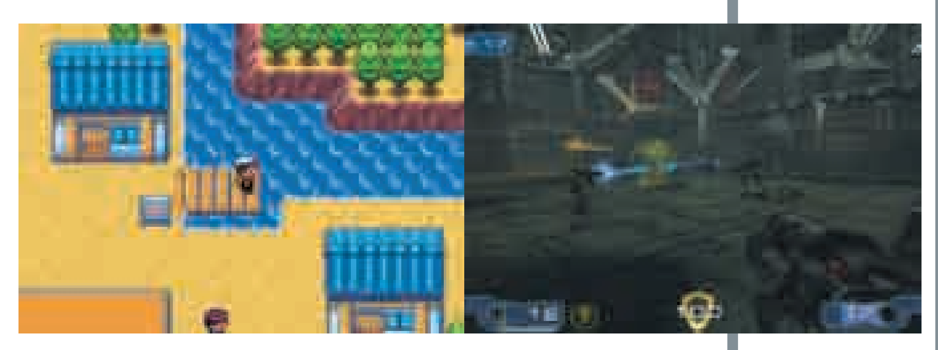
As expected, the PlayStation2 continues to dominate hardware sales despite being the least powerful and most expensive console on the market. There have been several slight changes to the situation recently; Microsoft's Controller S has become the standard Xbox controller, silencing critics of the larger pad and Nintendo has made some hardware launches of its own with the Wavebird having just arrived in stores. Japan and the US are soon to be treated to a new range of GameCube and Game Boy Advance colours too – platinum sets and emerald blue pads will surely help ship units and, if successful, we'll more than likely be enjoying the extra colours over here early next year.

From a software standpoint, it's a slightly different story. Strangely, the PC market has been the strongest in terms of units sold of late; we can only attribute this to the overwhelming success of *Unreal Tournament 2003* and the continued popularity of Maxis's life-game *The Sims* and all its expansions. PS2 follows closely behind with a huge drop to the next best software seller – in another freak occurrence, this is the PSone. Of the other consoles, only the Xbox manages to hold a market share above a sorry 5%, and even then only marginally.

Compare this to the value share chart and a lot becomes clear; PC and PSone are both knocked down considerably, allowing the PS2 to reclaim its throne. This can be attributed to the high PC and PSone sales being of budget products and expansion packs – these high sales from lower-priced items are to be expected. The only real surprise from these charts is the Game Boy Advance. Placed worryingly low on both quantity and value sales, Nintendo's handheld looks to be going through a troubled patch despite having a great line-up of titles. Perhaps gamers are wising up to the growing number of SNES ports the handheld receives week after week. Either way, the upcoming prospects of *Metroid*, *Pokémon* and *Zelda* on the small screen could be the boost the GBA so obviously needs.







UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**FIFA 2003**	EA	PS2, PC, Xbox, GC
2	**Pro Evolution Soccer 2**	Konami	PS2, PSX
3	**Time Splitters 2**	Eidos	GC, PS2, Xbox
4	**Colin McRae Rally 3**	Codemasters	PS2, Xbox
5	**Hitman 2: Silent Assassin**	Eidos	PS2, Xbox
6	**The Sims: Unleashed**	EA	PC
7	**Grand Theft Auto 3**	Rockstar	PS2, PC
8	**Monsters Inc.**	Disney/Sony/THQ	PS2, PSX, GBA, GBC
9	**Conflict: Desert Storm**	SCI	PS2, PC, Xbox
10	**Eternal Darkness**	Nintendo	GC

■ After a week on top, the mighty *Pro Evo 2* is unfortunately relegated to second place by EA's multi-format footballing update. Also notable is Nintendo's mind-bending *Eternal Darkness*, beating the likes of *Tekken 4* and *Super Mario Sunshine* to sneak into the top ten. Considering this chart was compiled on the dawn of *Vice City*, we don't foresee *FIFA* reigning for long…



UK Multi-format Sales Charts (w/e Sat Nov 2, 2002)


TOO MUCH PERHAPS?
over
over
25
PERFECT



Too near the edge

Just how far can games go before they become controversial, distasteful or just plain weird?

All too often these days, games are published that achieve very little in terms of creative imagery or original design. When this happens, usually during the lucrative Christmas period, the specialist games press is ready to pick out every little flaw that exists (which admittedly isn't that difficult with many of the titles around). Of course, in contrast to the glut of dross that appears every so often, there are some games that have a totally unique concept and style, but are fundamentally flawed in their technical execution – *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* on Xbox being a particularly pertinent example of this.

Conversely, however, there are games that try so hard to be original that the subject matter itself is too extreme to ever be accepted by the mass market. In Japan, the industry tends to be a little more open to new ideas and many innovative titles achieve high sales in the land of the rising sun. Of course, Western gamers want something new and fresh too, but the industry is often too afraid to risk pumping money into a game that might turn into the whitest of elephants. That's why when it comes to considering cultural diversity, innovation and controversy in videogames, we find ourselves having to ask the question: just how much is too much?



Weirdness

While sex and violence are two concepts that have clear guidelines when it comes to classification, weirdness is a little harder to rate. With many modern art forms, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that's very much the case when it comes to videogames. Just look at titles like *Animal Crossing* – those graphics may not impress the average Joe, but most hard-core gamers can appreciate the depth of creation behind the child-like visuals. It isn't be run-of-the-mill, but it's got a certain charm and is enjoyable to play.

But *Animal Crossing* is decidedly ordinary when compared to some of the bizarre titles out there. For the perfect example you need look no further than ex-Potato's latest arcade offering, *Come On Baby*. The game features a group of toddlers competing in a selection of cutesy mini-games, ranging from simple button-bashing races through to firing a rhinoceros across a playing field. Now, this may be little more than a surreal *Super Monkey Ball* rip-off in terms of content, but it's still mildly shocking when these babies reveal their private parts to camera when they lose a match. It's not just in Japan either – *Come On Baby* is currently playable in arcades all across Europe.

> "In Japan it's not unusual to see PS2 dating games in the charts or models dressed as schoolgirls."

games™ 003

Weirdness

MANY INNOVATIVE JAPANESE GAMES NEVER MAKE IT ABROAD BECAUSE WESTERN GAMERS DON'T ALWAYS APPRECIATE THINGS THAT ARE UNCONVENTIONAL.

Despite Japan's overall resentment towards the hardware itself, there's an upcoming Xbox game that's currently taking the country by storm. No, it's not *Halo 2*, *Project Gotham Racing 2* or even *Perfect Dark Zero*. It's actually *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. Created by popular Japanese development house Tecmo, the game features a selection of semi-naked women who can be dressed up and accessorized with a range of fashion items. Oh, and they play some volleyball too. In fact, the gameplay seems to have taken a backseat to the visuals for the entire development process, with Tecmo releasing more images of voluptuous young ladies relaxing by the poolside than any of them actually playing the sport. It's got to the stage now where, no matter how good or bad the final product turns out, it's almost certain to achieve enormous sales and, unlike most Japanese games featuring risqué content, this one should do well all around the world thanks to the hype generated by Microsoft. But is it really a good idea for a game? Either way, it'll make a substantial profit for both developer and publisher, while simultaneously entertaining its audience – and surely what this whole industry is all about?

East Versus West

Interestingly, *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* is something of an exception in terms of how willing European and American gamers are to accept Eastern titles – other big Japanese companies have been less successful at making worldwide names of their localised products. For a particularly good example of this, you need only look at Konami's *Goemon (Legend Of The Mystical Ninja)* adventure series. Not only have a mere fraction of the games made it out of Japan, but the first game on the SNES was horribly Americanised for its debut in the West (though later releases included more of the Japanese flavour that accounted for much of the overall atmosphere). In the West, the two main characters, Goemon and Ebisimaru, were re-named Kid Ying

Weird

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and that's very much the case when it comes to videogames.

MONEY

When the arcade industry really began to tail off a few years back, developers started creating cabinets that included all sorts of hydraulics and accessories that simply wouldn't be practical or affordable outside of the arcade. But, while some of these extravagant contraptions would be literally impossible in the home (can you imagine having two deluxe *Daytona* cabinets linked up in the family living room?), others, such as dance mats, arcade joysticks and lightguns, have made the transition and are becoming more commonplace all the time. Of course, these tend to be quite pricey and are usually only available in limited quantities, if at all – SEGA's *Samba De Amigo* on Dreamcast is the perfect example of this (as well being as one of our particular favourite peripheral-based titles). But it's not just arcade games that get the peripheral treatment. Capcom recently released *Steel Battalion (Tekki)* along with its unique 40-button controller in Japan and America for the equivalent of £130 and is due to follow this with a European release sometime in 2003. It's unclear at this stage exactly how much we're looking at if we want to get our hands on it over here, though we don't expect it to be any less than £150. Too much? Perhaps… but then you are paying for a gaming experience quite unlike anything else.

VIOLENCE

Violence is probably the subject that comes up most whenever videogames are discussed in the newspapers – who could forget the furore that surrounded *Mortal Kombat* when it was first released in the arcades? Of course, the flipside to that was the game's release on the SNES in 1993 – Nintendo is still criticised for its decision to remove much of the gore from the game. More recently, *Grand Theft Auto*, *State Of Emergency* and *Soldier Of Fortune* (amongst others) all managed to generate interest solely on the promise of violence. Of course, all publicity is good publicity and some companies can thrive on the controversy surrounding a title.

But some violent games never make it to retail in the form they were intended (some don't even get that far). SEGA changed the colour of the blood from red to green in its *House Of The Dead* series and never released its own Dreamcast lightgun in the States, due to the US's many gun-related crimes. By contrast, Running With Scissors refused to compromise the violent imagery in *Postal* on PC – a move that resulted in the game only being sold from the company's own website. *Postal 2* is now in the works, though it's unclear at this stage whether it will suffer the same fate as the original.

games™ 003
MONEY
HIGH DEVELOPMENT COSTS OFTEN DETER GAMES COMPANIES FROM EXPLORING NEW AVENUES, JUST AS A HIGH RETAIL PRICE CAN REDUCE SALES.



games™ 003
VIOLENCE
VIOLENCE HAS BEEN AN ISSUE IN VIDEOGAMES FOR AS LONG AS VIDEOGAMES HAVE EXISTED, ONLY NOW IT'S A LOT MORE VISUAL THAN IT USED TO BE.

and Dr Yang and the comedy storyline, which originally included mild sexual themes and adult humour, had been completely thrown out and re-written to appeal to a younger audience. Even now, Konami continues its struggle to get worldwide recognition for the series – the latest game, which was released in Japan amongst the first wave of PS2 titles, is only an intermittent feature on Konami's European release schedule. Even Konami itself couldn't commit to a definite European launch: "Goemon isn't scheduled for release in the UK at present," said a Konami representative. "However, Konami's current release schedule only covers until the end of the financial year, so we cannot confirm or deny whether it will be released in 2003 at this point". So far, so horribly vague.

But for all the Japanese games that do find a niche market in Western territories, there are even more that get released and never find an audience at all. Treasure's *Freak Out* is one such title – a game that was released on the PS2 at the end of the summer in 2001 and subsequently disappeared among the packed line-up that arrived during the run-up to Christmas. That said, this was no great loss to gamers when you take into account that it was easily the worst game the company had ever developed, as well as one so strange that even fans of such titles were left confused by its content. Thinking about it now, the game still doesn't make sense – this somewhat cutesy platform game was filled with women whose obsession with self-image had sent them spiralling into a different dimension, complete with floating islands and psychedelic colours. The aim was to rescue each of them by plucking at their heads with a magic scarf, while avoiding their large protective cleavages. Not exactly mass-market material, we're sure you'll agree.

Of course, the more astute among you may have noticed a pattern forming with the Japanese titles we've looked at: the plentiful use of the female form, a heavy focus on sexuality, adult themes… it seems that one of the main differences between the Japanese games industry and other territories is the level of tolerance towards sex. While it's not unusual to see PS2 dating simulation games climbing high up the charts in Japan, or Japanese models dressed as schoolgirls, the rest of the world

> "The industry has had to do a lot of maturing in a relatively short space of time"

VIOLENCE

Companies can thrive on the controversy



SEX

Whether she meant to or not, Lara Croft may very well have started a videogame sexual revolution in the West – after all, her more than ample appendages, Barbie doll waistline and unusual choice of outdoor clothing made her a household name overnight. At the height of her fame, there was even talk of an in-game cheat to remove the small amount of clothing she was wearing, although the existence of such a thing was never confirmed. Inevitably, it wasn't long until things moved up a few notches. Eidos's *Fear Effect 2* on PSone was sold almost entirely on the back of the lesbian undertones in the storyline.

Unsurprisingly though, the latest batch of games featuring sexual themes make *Fear Effect 2* look comparatively innocent next to their hi-res erotic imagery – *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* being a particularly visual example. Aside from the bouncy antics during the volleyball matches, images of the girls popping strawberries into each others' mouths and sucking each others' fingers have also been released to tantalise expectant gamers. However, everything else is pretty much redundant next to *BMX XXX*, which manages to blend just about every controversial issue there is in a tasteless frenzy of sex, violence and drug abuse – all neatly wrapped-up within the extreme sports genre. Genius, eh?

> "Eidos's Fear Effect 2 on PSone was sold almost entirely on the back of the lesbian undertones in the storyline"

games™ 004 SEX

SEX HAS BEEN AN UNDERLYING THEME IN TV AND FILM FOR YEARS, BUT IT'S STILL A FAIRLY NEW CONCEPT IN THE WORLD OF VIDEOGAMES.

tends to be uneasy about dealing with such issues. These things are certainly going on behind closed doors and are becoming more common in music and on TV but, as usual, the videogames industry is behind other entertainment media when it comes down to handling real issues. This may stem from the fact that, until the launch of PSone eight years ago, videogames were still seen as something for children. The industry has had to mature a lot in a relatively short space of time and has already had to deal with excessive violence and bad language – issues that still make headlines today. So perhaps it's not a case of how much is too much after all – perhaps it's more a case of how much can Western society handle.

Was Lara Croft sexy, or was she merely the first lady of videogames?

SEX

No Sex Please, We're British

Unless you've been living under a rock recently, you're probably aware of the difficulties Acclaim has been having with the distribution of *BMX XXX* (its new smut-filled extreme sports title) in America – not because of violence, but because of its heavy sexual content. While stores are more than happy to stock *Grand Theft Auto* with its car robberies, drive-by shootings and needless obliteration of innocent bystanders, all the big chain stores have refused to stock *BMX XXX* due to the fact that it features topless female riders, sexual swear words and DVD footage of real-life strippers – even though the game does have a mature rating.

Although the subject of sexuality has been touched upon (no pun intended) a few times over the past few years – Lara Croft being the obvious focal points [sic] during that period – the real nitty-gritty stuff is only just starting to make itself apparent. Perhaps by being the 'desirable' female icon that she was meant to be, Lara Croft was the beginning of a sexual revolution among videogames in the West. The truth of the matter is that over the past five years or so, publishers have begun aiming more of their games at the average gaming demographic – young men between the ages of 18 and 30 – and, as graphics technology has improved, potentially explicit imagery has become possible. Of course, the classification boards have been dealing with the issue of violence in videogames for ages, but have only had to start considering sexual issues on a regular basis since the rise of 3D. Having looked into the recommendations listed by the Video Standards Council, we were surprised at how comprehensive the guidelines actually are – the listings are now set up to consider topics such as eroticism, drug use, racial stereotypes and a range of issues regarding violence.

But even if a game does get past every barrier in its way – the conceptual stage, finding a publisher and successfully making it through classification unscathed – there's still no guarantee at the end of the day that our stores are going to stock it (as has been proved by *BMX XXX*). We suspect that, as more explicit titles come about, each level of the industry will become more accustomed to dealing with them. In Japan, sexual content tends to be very much incidental to the rest of the game rather than the main sales point as it so often seems to be over here. Only when the Western industry matures to a similar level and can cope with tender subjects more objectively will we, the gamers, get the chance to decide for ourselves just how much too much really is...

EIDOS GETS FRESH

WHY IS ONE OF THE GAMES INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST NAMES BRINGING ESOTERIC JAPANESE TITLES TO THE UK? WE FIND OUT…

Fresh Games is a division of Eidos that was set up earlier this year with the sole purpose of bringing obscure Japanese games to a Western audience. We caught up with Fresh's senior producer, Yota Wada, and product manager, Simon Wells, to find out more.

games™: What made Eidos decide to start publishing bizarre games that may only appeal to a small percentage of European gamers?
Simon Wells: I don't think Japanese games are bizarre at all – it's just that the Japanese just have a different way of thinking. We saw a gap in the market outside of Japan where people were looking to play something a little different from your average driving or platform game.
Yota Wada: I agree with Simon that the Japanese have a different way of thinking – after all, they have different cultures and values. Some Japanese titles may only appeal to a small percentage of Europeans, but I'd be happy if these people enjoy playing the games that we publish.

games™: What do you think makes the games you're publishing so appealing?
SW: There's always something unique about the games on the Fresh Games label and I think this attracts a lot of positive attention – *Mad Maestro!* was one of the first titles to use the touch-sensitive PS2 buttons and *Legaia 2* has a unique fighting system.
YW: You don't have to make games different to make them fun, but to expand our perception of what 'fun' is, fresh ideas are essential.

games™: Have you ever turned a title down because it was too weird?
SW: I don't think we'd ever turn anything down because it's too 'weird'. If you look at how popular games like *Rez* have been, it goes to show that it doesn't matter how different or weird a game is.
YW: Weird can often equate to a negative perception, but I like to believe that 'weird' or even 'bizarre' can be positive. I'd like to release as many Japanese games as possible but this isn't always practical in the world of business.

games™: Which Japanese games would you particularly like to see released in the UK?
YW: I'd like to see more Japanese RPG and anime games released here – British gamers are missing out on some great Japanese titles. I recently played *Dragon Quest 7* on PSone and it took me 100 hours to finish. The title went on to sell over five million units in Japan alone, can you believe that? I also love anime, especially the *Gundam* series. These games are successful in Japan but have yet to see the light of day in the UK.
SW: The Japanese are big on their crazes – you only need to look at things like Hello Kitty, Pokémon and the big craze over there at the moment, dating games. The basic premise behind them is to get someone to fall in love with you by using a number of different means. Although it may not appeal to a lot of the mainstream gamers over here, it's a very different idea and is something that sums up the Japanese take on gaming.

"Weird can often equate to a negative perception, but I believe that 'weird' or even 'bizarre' can be positive."


132770
HIGH



Somewhere over the rainbow, way up high, there's a land that I dream of... **Rainbow Islands Arcade [Taito] 1987**

DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME



> "THE LADIES OF DEAD OR ALIVE WILL LOOK AND MOVE MORE REALISTICALLY THAN EVER BEFORE"
> TOMONOBU ITAGAKI, TECMO

■ Tecmo hasn't been ashamed to admit that this is more about beautiful women than volleyball.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF DOA XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL

DEAD OR ALIVE + BEACH SPIKERS x BARBIE = DOA XBV

■ You may not think it, but playing the odd bit of volleyball now and then is actually very tiring.

■ The local beach stores sell well over 100 bikinis and accessories. Or you can design your own.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

IT MAY BE ONE OF THE BEST-LOOKING GAMES EVER, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE GAMEPLAY?

Many games companies put the importance of good visuals ahead of gameplay, but you'd be hard pushed to find one that's done it as blatantly as Tecmo with *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball*. Until now, they've been happy to talk about graphics engines, new characters and their polygon interpretations of the female form, but they've been less vocal about the actual gameplay mechanics. This could be for any number of reasons, but the most likely is that this aspect of the game simply isn't up to scratch – in America the game's release has been put back from November to January, which would suggest that a few last minute tweaks are being made. Let's face it, this needs to be at least as playable as SEGA's *Beach Spikers* if it's to stand any sort of chance at all.

But, while Tecmo hasn't revealed too much about how the actual volleyball is played, it's been keen to stress the fact that friendship and female bonding are an integral factor in progressing through the game. It's up to you to find a volleyball partner, though you'll have to prove your skills to her before she'll even consider teaming up with you. On top of that you'll have to keep her happy off the court too, mainly by buying her presents from one of the local beach stores. This section of the game is making a big noise in Japan – there are over a hundred bikinis, hats, sunglasses, shoes… there's even suntan lotion to stop the players getting burnt. As far as we can tell this RPG-esque feature isn't dissimilar to the myriad dating simulations that are currently so popular in Japan, only much more visual, as you can see. Of course, it's unlikely that any sort of sexual relationships will be included (as they are in some such Japanese games), though saying that, Tecmo has released images of the girls feeding each other strawberries and sucking each others' fingers in the process, so you never know.

As you'd expect, the items on sale in the beach stores can also be used to customize your player. With literally thousands of combinations possible, this is pretty much a game in itself – which, interestingly, is how *Xtreme Beach Volleyball* came to exist. You see, Tecmo was originally developing a title that was nothing more than an interactive fashion show, a sort of Barbie simulator, if you like. But, realizing that such a thing would only be popular in Japan, the company was forced to re-think the project, eventually combining the work they'd done with a prototype volleyball game that was initially planned as an extra for *Dead Or Alive 3*. The feature was cut from the final version of *DOA3* simply because Tecmo wanted the game to sell on its own merits, though critics would argue that such a thing would have helped the overall product considerably.

So, *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* is a blend of a Japanese dating simulation, a volleyball mini-game and an enhanced version of the DOA3 graphics engine – it doesn't exactly scream must-have, does it? However, this is Tecmo we're talking about – a company whose back catalogue includes *Project Zero*, *Monster Rancher* and many other well-known franchises.

Because of this heritage, we're fairly sure it'll be a solid little game with plenty of humour, if nothing else. And if, for some reason, it doesn't even achieve that, there are always the lovely graphics to look at.

DETAILS

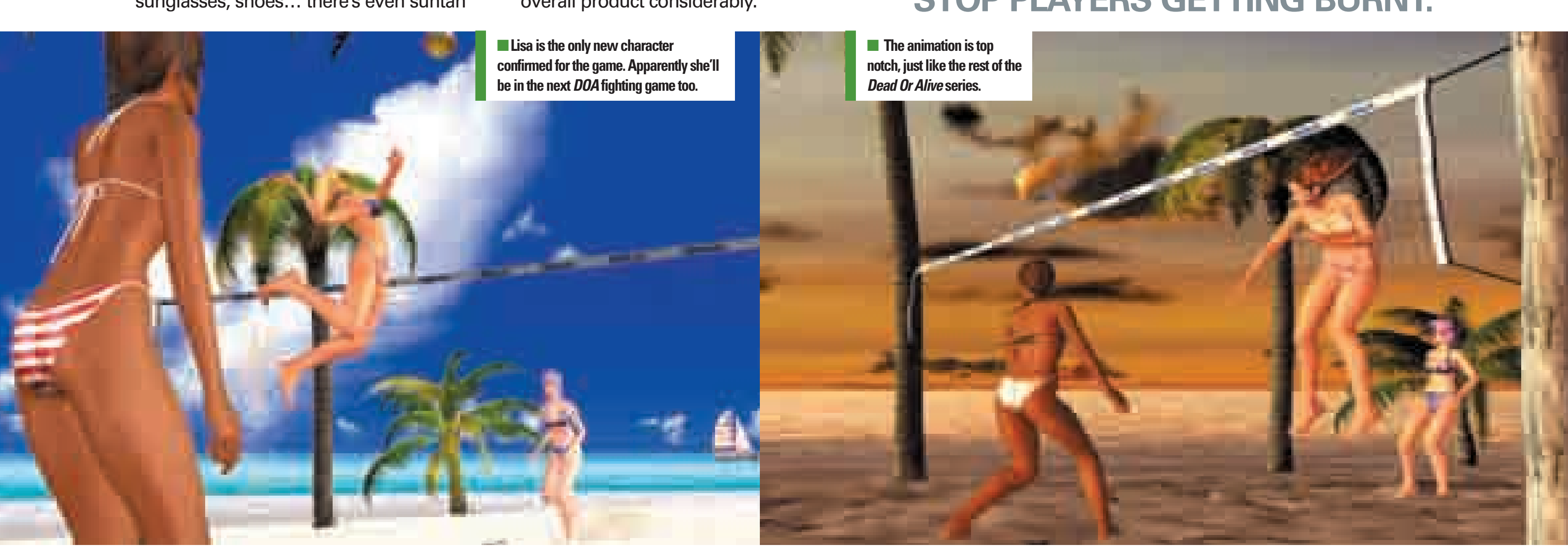
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Tecmo
RELEASE: 14 February '03
GENRE: Sport
PLAYERS: 1-4 (TBC)

It may be just a beach volleyball game at the core, but the introduction of relationships, a storyline and a range of mini-games should make this saucy title something special.

WISH YOU WERE HERE?

***Xtreme Beach Volleyball* is positively bursting with bonuses. The game's tropical island boasts a cinema, casino and an arcade – all of which are interactive. The cinema, for example, runs FMV clips of Tecmo titles, and you can play roulette and other games at the casino. There are also other mini-games that tie-in with the beach theme – a dancing competition and a beauty contest, for instance. Let's just hope there's a multiplayer mode…**

"THERE ARE OVER 100 BIKINIS, SUNGLASSES, HATS, SHOES… THERE'S EVEN SUNTAN LOTION TO STOP PLAYERS GETTING BURNT."



Lisa is the only new character confirmed for the game. Apparently she'll be in the next *DOA* fighting game too.

The animation is top notch, just like the rest of the *Dead Or Alive* series.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA



Facial expressions are an important addition to the *Zelda* series. Link's enormous eyes actually follow whatever or whoever he chooses to look at.

Newly revealed set pieces reveal that more detail has been added since the game was first unveiled.

IT MAY NOT BE WHAT YOU EXPECTED, BUT IT'S GOING TO BE SOMETHING SPECIAL…

Remember how the visual side of GameCube *Zelda* provoked mixed reactions from gamers when it was first unveiled? Some thought the new look was fresh and bold – resurrecting Nintendo's ability to take games in new, unexpected directions. But others viewed the move as a step back from what had been achieved on the N64. As time has gone on though, slight adjustments have been made to the appearance and new, more impressive set pieces have been revealed, helping to quash many of the negative reports. The style now looks much more rounded-off, with fantastic use of colour and just the right amount of texture to keep everything looking neat and clean enough to give the game a totally unique appearance.

The graphics engine now features some impressive lighting techniques designed to blend in with the 2D flavour. Various light-sources highlight the characters with vibrant, luminous patches, while shadows are represented by flat block colour. But the areas that have continued to impress us the most are the facial expressions and animations developed for the characters. The most advanced routines are obviously being used on Link, though other characters (including villagers and bad guys) also feature some of the most fluid movement ever created for a videogame. The overall results of these wonderful graphics actually bring the game in-line with where the series perhaps should have gone after *A Link To The Past* on the Super Nintendo.

Aside from the innovative visual approach however, the rest of the game is looking very much like the N64 prequels. The Z-Targeting lock-on technique is still used during battles and the strategic elements of the fights, though completely re-designed for this game, certainly lean towards the ones that were developed for *Ocarina Of Time*.

In fact, we've yet to see any truly innovative gameplay ideas in this new *Zelda*. Of course, *games™* is well aware of how secretive Nintendo can be regarding new features in its games – it's most likely that the breakthrough ideas have yet to be unveiled. At the end of the day though, would anyone really be disappointed if, like *Super Mario Sunshine*, this didn't offer anything new over its sublime prequels? Probably not.

So despite the mostly promising reports of GameCube *Zelda* lately, there are still quite a few questions left unanswered regarding the finished product. Apart from how original the content may turn out to be, we're still mildly worried that Nintendo could be taking its new short and sweet approach with this, rather than producing the epic that their fans are hoping for. Miyamoto touched on the subject a while back, hinting that this would indeed be larger than the company's other GameCube projects. But that could mean a range of things: *Zelda* could be huge, or it could turn out like *Super Mario Sunshine* in that the actual map isn't big, but each area uses repetition to increase the number of hours needed to complete the game. Either way, this is a Nintendo in-house product – a fact that guarantees a high level of polish. Another certainty is that this is going to sell consoles – which is, of course, what Nintendo needs to be doing if it's to continue as a hardware manufacturer.

DETAILS

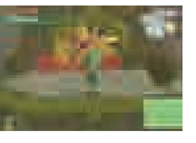
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: April '03
US – Feb '03
Jap – Dec '02
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

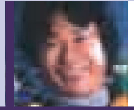
The change in graphics is controversial, but the gameplay remains classic Nintendo – help Link save the day in this gloriously epic action adventure.

A LINK TO THE GAME BOY

As with many of Nintendo's upcoming GameCube games, Zelda has elements that can only be accessed via a link-up to the Game Boy Advance. By connecting a GBA to the second controller port of your GC, an onscreen message alerts you when a GBA-compatible section is nearby. Switching on the GBA will reveal a map of the area, complete with cracks in the scenery that aren't visible in the main game. Drop a bomb near the crack using the GBA D-pad to blow up the wall and reveal a secret passage in the main game.







DESIGNER PROFILE

■ Born in Kyoto, Japan, in 1953, Shigeru Miyamoto has been one of the key figures in videogaming history since the late seventies. After leaving college at the age of 23, he joined Nintendo as a staff artist in 1977 but didn't start working as a games designer until 1980. His first game was *Donkey Kong*.

HISTORY

- **LEGEND OF ZELDA** 1986 [NES]
- **SUPER MARIO BROTHERS** 1985 [NES]
- **DONKEY KONG** 1980 [Arcade]

"WHAT WE ARE DOING IS MAKING ZELDA AS UNIQUE AS POSSIBLE, BECAUSE UNIQUENESS IS SOMETHING THAT GAMERS ARE ALWAYS LOOKING FOR…"

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO, NINTENDO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

GETTING UNDER THE TUNICS OF LINK AND HIS MATES…

OCARINA OF TIME + JET SET RADIO - N64 = LEGEND OF ZELDA

■ Most of the puzzles included are pretty much straight out of *The Ocarina Of Time*. Let's hope just as much thought has gone into the design.

■ We're not entirely sure how these sailing sections fit into the grand scheme of things. Perhaps this is how you travel between the various islands of Hyrule?

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD



■ Zombies full of holes are not uncommon now that you’ve been entrusted with a shotgun.

■ The graphical power of the Xbox makes even these ugly freaks look good. Not in a sexy way, mind.

THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD 3
XBOX

3



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Originally dubbed R&D AM1 when it was formed in 1992, WOW Entertainment (as it became known in April 2002) has around 120 employees and is headed up by Rikiya Nakagawa. The name WOW was chosen to illustrate the company's aim of constantly surprising people with the games it produces.

HISTORY

- **HOME RUN KING** 2002 [GameCube]
- **ALIEN FRONT ONLINE** 2001 [Dreamcast]
- **HOUSE OF THE DEAD** 1997 [Arcade]

THEY MIGHT BE DEAD, BUT AT LEAST THEY KEEP THEIR MORTGAGE PAYMENTS UP…

SEGA seems to be one of the few companies who can make the powerful Xbox hardware really shine. *Jet Set Radio Future* made it perfectly clear that SEGA had every intention of getting it right from day one and, bar a few minor hiccups, it has done just that, with titles like *SEGA GT 2002* outclassing the competition time after time. Not surprisingly, *The House Of The Dead 3* looks set to continue this trend. From the minute we set eyes on the early cel-shaded pictures, we though it looked really rather special. Due to public outcry however, the brave cartoony style has since been dropped in favour of a much more traditional and sinister look. But that's not to say that this is a traditional shooter – those constantly innovating people at SEGA have been toying with some new gameplay elements that will set this zombie-filled romp apart from similar titles.

For starters, the classic lightgun six-shooter has been pushed to one side; this time, you go into battle with your itchy finger locked around the trigger of a far more useful shotgun. This has meant that the development team has really gone to town with the reactions of the hapless undead – limbs are blown off, heads pop and bellies burst wide open as you fight your way to each chapter's grotesquely oversized boss enemy. These, as usual, have a shocking immunity to normal gunfire in all but a few areas and it's only through exploiting these weaknesses that you'll progress. In these situations, a second gauge appears as the boss charges up an attack; knock this bar down in time and you'll halt the incoming blow and avoid damage. This works in a similar way to sections of *Vampire Night* and encourages both speed and accuracy in equal measure – it's great to see such a good balance in effect, especially when many other shooters focus on either one or the other of the two aspects.

The new gameplay in Timed Mode delighted us with an absence of life icons, opting instead for a time bar at the bottom of the screen. Get damaged by an enemy and you'll lose precious seconds, while time can be won back with some skilful shooting and automatically awarded at certain points in the levels. Don't jump to the conclusion that this experiment makes the game any easier, though – boss enemies will knock your time bar down without batting an eyelid and without any marauding zombies around, you won't be getting those precious seconds back either.

This feature seems a little odd at first but you have to give credit to SEGA for wanting to try something new. Titles like Namco's *Point Blank* and *Time Crisis* are far from original so it's always nice to see a little innovation in the genre. If this new game mode doesn't work for you, fear not; the more traditional health/ damage system is also on offer under the moniker of Survival Mode.

Graphically, *The House of the Dead 3* is as impressive as anything else we've seen on the machine so far, although overly dramatic light sourcing and shadow casting constantly remind us of its cel-shaded past. Then again, perhaps the world just isn't ready for a cel-shaded horror game. Either way, the combination of tweaks and alterations to the tried-and-tested shooter formula could be enough to grant the lightgun genre life after death.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: WOW Entertainment
RELEASE: Q1 '03
Japan – TBA
USA – Out Now
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ SEGA's ever-popular arcade blasting series lands on the Xbox for the first time, with some unique gameplay tweaks…

PERIPHERAL VISION

Wander by the lightgun cabinets in your local arcade and the first thing you'll notice will be the sheer variety of colourful plastic firearms on offer. Unfortunately, the Xbox doesn't have such an arsenal yet – in fact, there isn't a single lightgun available. Given that *House of the Dead 3* will be the first Xbox title to use one, this is hardly surprising. What is somewhat odd is that there's no word yet on an official Microsoft Xbox lightgun; currently, only Mad Katz and Joytech have made it known that they'll be releasing gun controllers. That said, SEGA officially recognizes the Mad Katz gun on their Web site so it looks like this will be deemed the 'official' peripheral from their point of view.



■ The lighting engine obviously hasn't been changed since the game's early cartoon-style beginnings; the flat shadows here demonstrate this nicely.

■ Ashes to ashes, sludge to sludge – shoot the slimy zombies enough times and they'll melt away to snotty liquid.

CAPCOM FIGHTING ALL-STARS



■ Luke is one of two brand new characters designed exclusively for *Capcom Fighting All-Stars*. Why Capcom didn't include a better-known cast is anyone's guess.

CAN THE STREETFIGHTER SERIES STAND ANOTHER INSTALMENT?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Arcade
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ Some of Capcom's finest return for a fighting extravaganza… although this time, they step into the realm of 'proper' 3D brawling instead.

"CAPCOM'S MOVE INTO 3D HAS BEEN A SLOW PROCESS, BUT THE RESULTS ARE QUITE NICE."

If you've always been a fan of Capcom's genre-defining *StreetFighter* series, chances are you've not been particularly impressed with the majority of 3D beat-'em-ups that have littered the shelves since the introduction of the PSone. Although many include huge moves lists, the purity and timing of the old-school classics have been dropped in favour of accessibility and button-bashing combos. Even Capcom itself has dabbled in this market: the *StreetFighter EX* series, despite featuring many familiar aspects, has been dumbed down considerably with the transition to 3D.

So when Capcom announced a brand new arcade 3D beat-'em-up, we were hoping it would deliver something a little more traditional. Sadly, that isn't happening with *Capcom Fighting All-Stars* but, considering how similar this initially looks to *StreetFighter EX3*, it does actually seem as if Capcom has been fairly creative as far as gameplay goes.

For starters, *Capcom Fighting All-Stars* features four attack buttons (two punches and two kicks) while a fifth button has been added for sidestepping. Then there's the parry – basically a method of reversing an attack by pressing forward at the exact moment that a blow impacts, immediately followed by one of your own moves. This technique was first seen in *StreetFighter 3*, but was hardly used. Capcom has also slightly changed the structure of the fights by discarding the usual rounds system. Instead, each character has three energy bars and a break in the fight occurs when one is emptied – the same as in *Dark Stalkers* and *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*.

While *Capcom Fighting All-Stars* sounds good enough on paper, we can't help feeling that this probably won't be as great as we hope. The problem with the *StreetFighter EX* series was that the timing between attacks wasn't nearly as precise as it was in the 2D games – a problem that could quite easily still be an issue with this. We're also a little concerned that, amongst a selection of 'all-stars', such relative unknowns as Poison from *Final Fight* and Batsu from *Rival Schools* are included. Hopefully, our doubts will be quashed when the game arrives early next year.



■ Ryu demonstrates the new sidestep. The similar-looking *StreetFighter EX* games only ever allowed movement on a single 2D axis.

■ The huge variation to the characters should allow for some interesting fights. Just how does the slow, lumbering Haggar get past projectiles?


eMag



XIII

LUCKY THIRTEEN FOR UBI SOFT. ONCE AGAIN, THE FRENCH DO THINGS WITH STYLE…

Mention the subject of comics to any gamer and the response you get will generally depend on how old they are. For example, while we've obviously heard of *The Eagle*, *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, we were more into *Transformers*, *Action Man* and *MASK* when we were young. As we've matured though (comparatively speaking, of course), so has our taste in comics – out went typical action types like Dan Dare and He-Man, while in came anti-heroes such as anarchistic journalist Spider Jerusalem from *Transmetropolitan* and solider-cum-hellspawn Al Simmons from *Spawn*. Yes, we're a bit little twisted in the head… so sue us.

Despite the fact that we consider ourselves slightly hard-core when it comes to comics though, there's one hero that even we hadn't heard of until recently – if only because we've never read a Belgian comic book apart from *Tintin* before. His name is XIII – yes, XIII – his job as a government assassin is shrouded in secrecy and his popularity across France, Belgium and other European countries is (according to our international sources) rather phenomenal. Up until now though, Monsieur XIII's exploits haven't really touched the consciousness of the English-speaking world. So what better way to do it than in a videogame that looks just like the comic books that he came from?

"Actually, the idea for creating a cel-shaded FPS came up some time ago – way before we got the license for *XIII*," says Julien Bares, *XIII*'s producer. "To be honest, we were a little fed up with the continuous 'graphic realism' of first-person shoot-'em-ups, which is good too but doesn't offer a lot of room for innovation… except more and more realism, of course. We wanted to make something totally new, because we were all convinced it could be great."

Of course, the more cynical gamers out there may feel that *XIII* is nothing but a mixture of genres that are currently in vogue (or '*GoldenEye* meets *Jet Set Radio*', if you're feeling particularly harsh). Surprisingly though, the developers take such comparisons as a compliment rather than an insult.

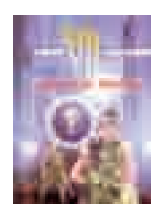
"Certainly, we took some inspiration from *GoldenEye*, along with other games, for the gameplay because it is easily one of the best console FPS games in terms of the controls being very intuitive," admits Bares. "Aside from that though, our game is very different as *XIII* is not meant to be a James Bond character. The story is quite original, as are various gameplay features such as using almost any object as a weapon or the fact that you can use enemies as a human shield. I don't think these ideas are in any FPS at the moment." Judging by the blank looks we've seen when people talk about *XIII*, it's obvious that not many gamers are aware of the 'original story' that the game features. But the truth is that when the game begins, you're not supposed to know what's going on: finding yourself on a beach with only a locker key and a mysterious 'XIII' tattoo for company, it seems as though your entire memory has been lost for good. As you start to play the game though, you'll begin to unravel your past through a combination of interaction with other characters, investigation and various 'flashback' scenes – sections that gradually reveal your identity but still ▷

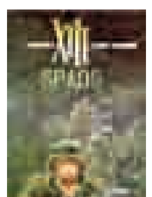
DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox/PS2/GameCube/PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ It might look like a comic, but Ubi Soft's cel-shaded FPS isn't for kids. Instead, it's a violence-packed conspiracy adventure that closely follows the comic books on which it is based.

TINTIN, IT AIN'T





First published in Belgium in 1994, *XIII* is currently one of the most popular comic book series across several different countries and has produced 15 different volumes. Although the whole of the *XIII* series has been translated from the original French into numerous languages (including German and Spanish), only the first three volumes ever made it onto English-speaking shores (unfortunately, the UK publisher went bust shortly after acquiring the license). In converting the license into a videogame, Ubi Soft has used the first five volumes of the comic as a plot base – *The Night Of The Black Sun, Where The Indian Goes, All The Tears Of Hell, SPADS* and *Total Red*.



■ Don't panic or anything, but I think the guy who's firing at you might have found where you're hiding…



"WE WERE A LITTLE FED UP WITH REALISM… WE WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING NEW, BECAUSE WE WERE ALL CONVINCED THAT IT COULD BE GREAT."
JULIEN BARES, UBI SOFT

XIII (CONTINUED)



First rule of trying to be a stealthy government agent – running up to enemies head-on isn't a good idea.

This bloke's just been on the receiving end of a chair – a perfect example of commando gameplay.

"IT MIGHT LOOK LIKE A CARTOON, BUT DON'T BE FOOLED – XIII IS DEFINITELY NOT A GAME FOR KIDS"

allow you to control the action.

Of course, it's only when you discover that the president of the United States has been assassinated, that you might have had something to do with it and that even the supposed good guys are after your blood that the story really kicks into high gear… As *XIII* is based on the first five volumes of the best-selling comic book, the plot of the game is relatively faithful to the license. What's more, the translation from comic book to videogame has been a smooth one – mainly because Ubi Soft sensibly decided to collaborate with the original writer, Jean Van Hamme, and artist, William Vance, to ensure that the dialogue, locations and recognisable characters were faithful to the original. Despite all the connections to the comic though, the developers are keen to stress that *XIII* isn't a title that only fans will enjoy.

"There is no need to have read the comic book to enjoy the game," promises Bares. "In fact, I would say it's even better if you don't know the comic book because then it would be a brand new story for you." Which can only be a good thing.

Even if you didn't know *XIII* was a based on a comic, you could probably guess simply because of the way it looks. Of course, just because *XIII* is the first FPS to use cel-shading as its preferred medium, that doesn't mean Ubi Soft is attempting to jump on the bandwagon that's been picking up speed since the days of *Jet Set Radio* on the Dreamcast.

"*XIII* couldn't have been done without such graphics," insists Bares, "because the cel-shading works with the gameplay, rather than because it's the trend to do so. We had a strong will to be different with *XIII* – we could have done just another FPS that was realistic and had classic features like an amazing number of weapons, but we thought it was time to do something different with the ambience and gameplay."

Even though it might sound like just a gimmick, it soon becomes clear exactly how the cel-shaded comic book graphics enhance *XIII*'s style of gameplay. For instance, the use of on-screen cues to highlight noise is a particularly useful tool – everything from a guard's footsteps to the rattle of machine-gun fire is registered as an on-screen word, which allows you to judge how close a person is or how loud you're being when a stealthy approach might be preferable. It's such a unique feature that the team has trademarked it as "Comic Rendering" – and judging by the grin on Bares's face, he's more than a little proud of it.

Something else that Bares and the rest of his team seem to be very happy with is an element branded "Commando Gameplay" – "another first for first-person shoot-'em-ups, thanks to *XIII*", according to Bares. Being the highly trained operative that he is, XIII can use virtually anything nearby as a weapon. Stuck in a prison cell with no way out? Just pick up a chair and smash the guard over the head with it. Don't want to take on the squad of soldiers in the warehouse? Then drop a shipping container on their heads and kill them all in one go.

According to the team, you can interact with almost any item, such as a bottle, ashtray or fire extinguisher, and then use it offensively. You can even smash a window and then pick up the shards of glass to throw at enemies. It's all very clever and serves to emphasise the important stealth element of the game – something which many people might miss, given that this is a first-person shoot-'em-up.

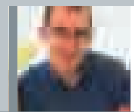
Make no mistake about it, *XIII* isn't just about storming through levels with your guns blazing. Just as XIII is a trained assassin with stealth on his side, you too must try to stay out of harm's way and find more imaginative ways of taking out your enemies. Think *Metal Gear Solid*-style espionage, but from a first-person perspective (and with comic book graphics too, of course).

Given the strength of the game so far, it's no surprise that Ubi Soft is expecting big things from *XIII* – if it does well enough, we doubt it'll be the only time we see the adventures of XIII in videogame form. And then there's the fact that *XIII* only covers a third of the comics currently available. Surely that means there's a sequel in the bag already?

"At the moment, we haven't got any plans for a sequel – our priority is to finish this game first… but, of course, it's something we'd really like to do," says Bares. "The reason why we based this game on only the first five volumes of the comic is because they represent a complete story in themselves and will engross the player without leaving too many unanswered questions. Saying that though, the story is really rich and there are possible scenarios for additional games in it, that's for sure."

So, we'll take that as a definitely maybe, right? Bah. Honestly, you can never get a straight answer out of developers these days…





PRODUCER PROFILE

Julien Bares joined the Ubi Soft team back in 1997. He immediately began producing games for the PC before heading up a small creative ideas team. Having previously lived in China, he was sent to Ubi Soft's Shanghai office to help develop *F1 Racing* for the PS2 before moving back to France in 2001 to work on *XIII*.

HISTORY

- **F1 RACING** 1998 [PS2]
- **F1 RACING** 1997 [PC]

You can creep up on enemies and take them hostage. Like in *Die Hard: Vendetta* (only better).

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SMACKING THE KER-POW! OUT OF XIII

SOLDIER OF FORTUNE x JET SET RADIO + '70s BATMAN = XIII

Too many soldiers, not enough bullets. If only you'd thought to drop that huge crate on them, eh?

See? We told you it wasn't for kids. *XIII* might look like a cartoon, but the violence is pretty graphic…

THE GETAWAY


It's possible to grab hold of nearby characters and use them as shields – very handy during shoot-outs.

TEAM SOHO'S MUCH ANTICIPATED CRIME CAPER IS ALMOST UPON US. GUY RITCHIE, EAT YOUR HEART OUT…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Team Soho
RELEASE: December '02
GENRE: Driving/Action
PLAYERS: 1 Player

Race through the streets of London in this objective-based gangster thriller that's been in development ever since the PS2 was announced.

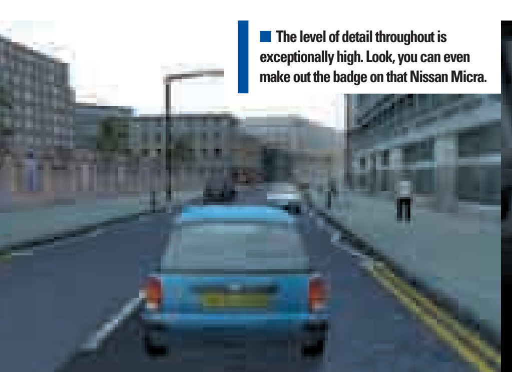
"AFTER AEONS OF WAITING, THE GETAWAY IS FINALLY READY – AND IT LOOKS LIKE ALL THAT DEVELOPMENT TIME HAS BEEN WELL SPENT."

It's well documented that the development of this hugely ambitious title hasn't gone as smoothly as Sony might have hoped. In fact, it seems that certain elements within the industry have had it in for *The Getaway* from day one. But accusations that the game would never see the light of day have proved to be unfounded. Having sampled near-finished code, we can confirm that developer Team Soho looks like it will deliver a deeply engrossing crime caper that should convince players that they're running amok in the 'the big smoke'.

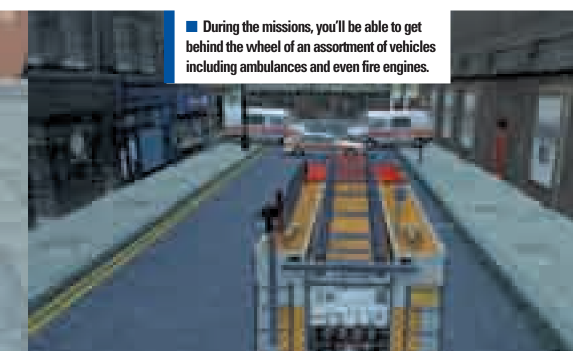
The game is broadly divided into two sets of missions: in one, you control Mark Hammond, a former crook now on the run; while in the other, you're Frank Carter, a suspended member of the Flying Squad. The first set must be completed before gaining access to the others, but the plots of both stories intertwine – over 60 minutes of cut-scenes are included, but don't panic, these aren't as intrusive as those of *MGS2*.

With its mix of driving and foot-based action, comparisons with *GTA III* are, of course, inevitable but once you see *The Getaway* in action, it becomes clear that it's very much its own game. The 40 square kilometres of virtual London you can explore are exceptionally lavish and the 20 real-life interior locations all look suitably convincing. To be frank, it's fair to say that aside from some rather suspect pop-up, *The Getaway* is set to be an attractive title.

From what we played, *games™* feels that the driving element is better implemented than the stages where you're on your plates of meat – vehicles handle convincingly and are incredibly detailed while the real-time damage is quite realistic. The on-foot sections, however, suffer from rather awkward controls and some odd frames of character animation – fingers crossed, this will be rectified in the final code. Luckily, a plethora of little touches do impress. For example, drive through a police roadblock and watch your back windscreen shatter as armed cops pump bullets into your fleeing car. All in all, it looks like *GTA: Vice City* may not have it all its own way this Christmas. But then again…


The level of detail throughout is exceptionally high. Look, you can even make out the badge on that Nissan Micra.




During the missions, you'll be able to get behind the wheel of an assortment of vehicles including ambulances and even fire engines.


eMag

SIM CITY 4



The detail on the huge number of different structures is remarkable.

EARTHQUAKES, FLOODS… JUST ANOTHER DAY IN CAPITAL CITY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Maxis
RELEASE: TBC
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1

The concept might not have changed much over the years, but *Sim City 4* looks better than it ever has… which can only be a good thing really.

> "BY COMBINING THE AGE-OLD CONCEPT WITH NEW IDEAS, THIS LOOKS TO BE THE BEST SIM CITY GAME YET"

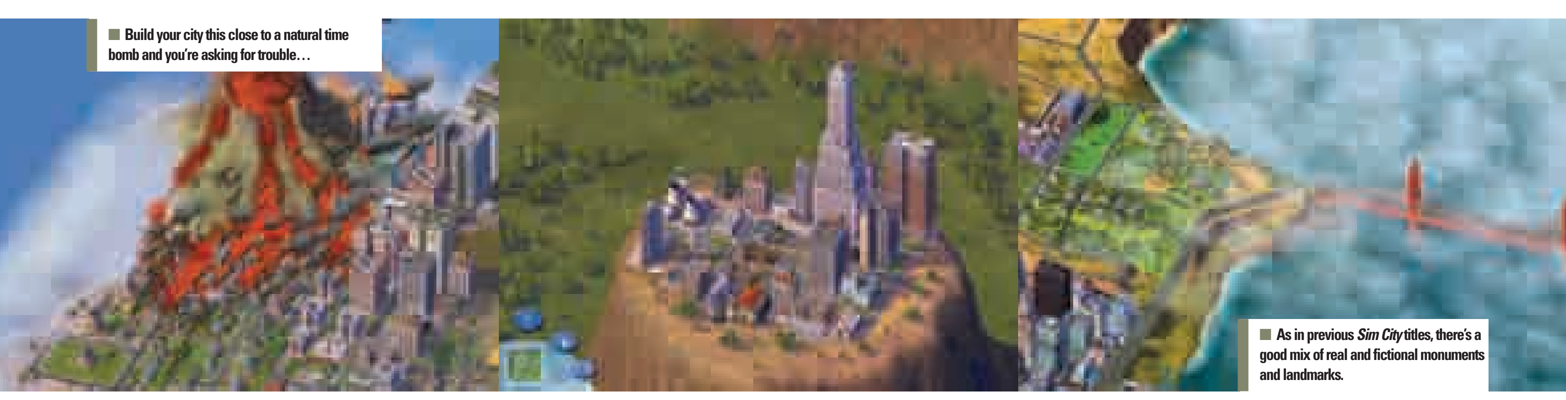
It's a fact of the games industry that some titles will never grow old. Go back to the original *Theme Park* or *Sim City* and you'll find a game as playable as the day it was released. Granted, the frequent updates add gorgeous new visuals and all sorts of extra features, but the core of the game remains the same.

Although the original came out in 1989, Maxis is at it again with *Sim City 4*, the next evolution of their popular metropolis management series – and it's looking to totally revitalise the franchise. Having gone off at a sim tangent for a while with crazy ventures like *Sim Ant*, it's good to see the Sim series return to the urban jungle from which it originated. The success of *The Sims* has obviously been taken into account too, as many aspects of the life management game now seem to be present in the big city.

As it's such an established genre, it's likely that most gamers will know what to expect from a Maxis management title. As mayor of a new settlement, you must establish the right balance of buildings, infrastructure, utilities, and culture. Success will see happy citizens and population growth as well as ensuring your place in political history.

Failure may leave your struggling town in a state of riot-filled disrepair. Each resident will be capable of voicing their opinion of the current situation and each has their own personality, largely determined by their starsign. This means you're much more aware of exactly what it is that your city wants or needs rather than leaving everything to guesswork – something that sets *Sim City 4* apart from its competitors.

Throw in the possibility of natural and man-made disasters – volcanoes, hurricanes, riots and strikes (among other things) – and you'll see that you'll have your work cut out reaching the pinnacle of economic and political success. This game, like many of Maxis's other titles, will eat up your free time like you cannot imagine. Sim games on the PC are hardly rare, but with the wealth of new features seen so far, it's hard to imagine *Sim City 4* not being hugely successful on its as-yet unconfirmed release date next year.



Build your city this close to a natural time bomb and you're asking for trouble…

As in previous *Sim City* titles, there's a good mix of real and fictional monuments and landmarks.


eMag

PANZER DRAGOON ORTA

A DRAGON REBORN… SEGA BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO THE CLASSIC SERIES FOR THE XBOX

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Smilebit
RELEASE: Q1 '03
Japan – 6 December '02
USA – Q1 '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

■ SEGA takes the *Panzer Dragoon* series back to its roots and gives the fans what they want – an all-out dragon-blasting frenzy.

Before you start reading, take a moment to just savour and enjoy these screenshots. Why? Because *Panzer Dragoon Orta* is, without question, one of the most beautiful games we've ever seen. As if these gorgeous stills weren't enough, the game somehow manages to fling images of this quality around with ease; the Xbox processor handles the particle effects, real-time lighting and wealth of other graphical features without even breaking a sweat. Make no mistake – this game is a shooter in the most literal sense of the word but, as usual, SEGA has worked its magic to make it seem like there's so much more to it. The core concept is a shoot-'em-up through and through; you must take to the sky on your transforming dragon and fend off attacks from all around, while trying to reach the huge boss lying in wait at the end of each stage.

The gameplay feels very much like *Rez*, albeit with a little more control and variety, although the lock-on system is remarkably similar. It should also be noted that the pace is nowhere near as fast as SEGA's lo-fi shooter, but this is an intentional move; players are encouraged to take in the view as they glide through the vast rolling plains and gloomy caves rather than blasting anything that moves.

The dragon itself now has some pretty neat tricks at its disposal, including several unique transformations. Killing enemies builds up a gauge in the bottom left of the screen, which can be used to turn your dragon into one of three different forms: a basic form; a small, speedy dragon with no lock-on ability and a huge but sluggish dragon that has great lock-on capabilities. All three of these have their uses – in a chase, the large beast will quickly lose ground on the enemy whereas the speedy dragon will easily catch and outmanoeuvre a fleeing foe. On the other hand, the burly dragon will make short work of even large crowds of enemies while the poor old smaller one will have its work cut out just staying alive. This switching brings an element of strategy to the game – use the transformations too much and you may not be able to change dragons when you really need to.

Another meter to be wary of is the bulb on the far end of your gauges – this represents your dragon's rage level. As soon as the light starts blinking, the dragon is capable of unleashing its Berserk Attack; this locks onto and kills every nearby enemy in a devastating (and impressive) blast of colourful lasers. This can also be a useful tool for bosses, although to a lesser effect.

There's also the option to accelerate and brake tactically, but these are implemented as a brief boost and a sudden hard brake (much like in *Starwing*) as opposed to having full speed control. SEGA has put this method to good practical use in the levels too – from enemies that are shielded on one side to bosses with weak points round the back, you can expect to need this positioning system often in order to proceed in one piece.

If the quality that we've seen so far is carried throughout the whole game, the Xbox could have another must-have title on its hands upon the game's release early in the new year. Fingers crossed, this latest title in the series should convince a lot of fans of the old Saturn games to pick up an Xbox if they haven't already done so. It's always great to see an old favourite given new life on a next-gen console and it's even better when the game makes the transition as well as this. Next year simply can't come soon enough.

BUT IS IT ART?

As games technology progresses, the line between art and games gets ever thinner. Many recent examples of this can be traced straight back to SEGA, who has given us titles that truly redefine the boundaries – *Rez* and *Cosmic Smash* proved that less can be more. This isn't to say that SEGA is the only developer with an art influence. In an age when most developers are vying for super-realistic graphics, it's refreshing to see a company with the guts to release a game involving monkeys in balls or a gameplay-focused shoot-'em-up. As long as ambitious programmers continue to come up with ambitious titles such as *Ico* and *Animal Crossing*, the games/art divide will soon be a thing of the past.

"BEAUTIFUL AND FRANTIC – THIS REALLY COULD BE A DEFINING MOMENT IN GAMING HISTORY…"



■ Kill enough enemies and you'll be able to use your Berserk Attack – ten glorious seconds of colourful mass destruction.



■ The many enemies aren't your only obstacles – at times you'll be battling the elements too.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Formed in April 2000 and overseen by President Shun Arai, Smilebit has been responsible for some truly unique and ground-breaking titles – for example, it was one of the first developers to use cel-shading as the basis for a complete game (as seen in *Jet Set Radio* on the Dreamcast).

HISTORY

- **GUNVALKYRIE** 2002 [Xbox]
- **TYPING OF THE DEAD** 2001 [Dreamcast]
- **SEGA RALLY 2** 1999 [Dreamcast]

■ Not everything that flies needs to be shot; occasionally other riders will work alongside you and serve as excellent wingmen.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BLASTING PANZER DRAGOON TO PIECES

REIGN OF FIRE - CHRISTIAN BALE + SMILEBIT = PANZER DRAGOON

"SEGA HAS EARNED A REPUTATION FOR DEVELOPING INDUSTRY-LEADING CONTENT… WE ARE CONTINUING TO ADD INNOVATIVE FEATURES AND CONTENT TO PANZER DRAGOON."

MIKE FISCHER, VP ENTERTAINMENT MARKETING, SEGA OF AMERICA

■ Even those who don't particularly like the game will find it hard to criticise it visually, especially with sweeping landscapes such as these.

SKIES OF ARCADIA LEGEND

SEGA'S EPIC PIRATE RPG HITS THE GAMECUBE WITH A YO-HO-HO

"ANYONE WHO DIDN'T EXPERIENCE THE DELIGHTS OF THIS AMAZING RPG FIRST TIME AROUND IS IN FOR A TREAT"

■ Although Vyse starts off as a young pirate upstart, he soon ends up with his very own ship and crew to look after.

With Nintendo's new machine currently all but devoid of quality RPGs, adventurers everywhere will be glad to hear that respected Dreamcast title *Skies Of Arcadia* will be winging its way to the GameCube early next year, albeit in an upgraded form. Surprisingly, developer Overworks has opted for an updated Director's Cut of the original rather than an all-new game, although hours of brand new gameplay have been added to tie up some of the story's loose ends.

For those who missed out on it first time around, *Skies Of Arcadia* tells the epic tale of a gallant band of Air Pirates whose adventures span a huge game world where you're free to fly around as you please. It's refreshing to find a game where exploration is positively encouraged; flying to lost continents in search of archaeological relics is an adventure in itself and often provides the budding explorer with fame and fortune.

Not only is the game world vast, but it's also rather pretty. Changes over the Dreamcast version's visuals are only slight, but this isn't a major concern as it means that the game's style and charm thankfully remain intact.

One of the big changes from the Dreamcast original is the totally new character who's been added into the storyline; apparently, she was essential for tying in the new plotlines that the developers wanted to feature. Enter the tentatively-named Piastol – a female bounty hunter after the price on lead character Vyse's head (although her exact position in the overall scheme and whether she will be playable still remains to be seen). Overworks has hinted that she may not be the only new major character and, if the story has been expanded as much as we're led to believe, we'd really expect this to be the case. The battle system is also undergoing some tweaking to draw a definite gap between the party combat and the epic ship battles – previously the two were virtually identical.

From what we've seen so far, *Skies Of Arcadia Legend* is shaping up wonderfully – the GameCube needs a truly great RPG and by polishing up an established and renowned title already heralded as a classic, Overworks could be providing it with just that.

While the graphics may not push the hardware as much as we might like, the scope and scale of this game – as well as the sheer charm and style – are totally apparent throughout. Hopefully, that should be enough to see this great reworking receive the kind of widespread success that it missed first time around on SEGA's ill-fated Dreamcast.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Overworks
RELEASE: TBA
Japan – 26 Dec '02
USA – Jan '03
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ A port of the original *Skies Of Arcadia* on the Dreamcast, but with additional side quests, improved graphics and enhanced battle mechanics.



■ It's not always air-to-air combat in your ship and you'll occasionally need its extra firepower to deal with larger enemies like this huge Gigas.

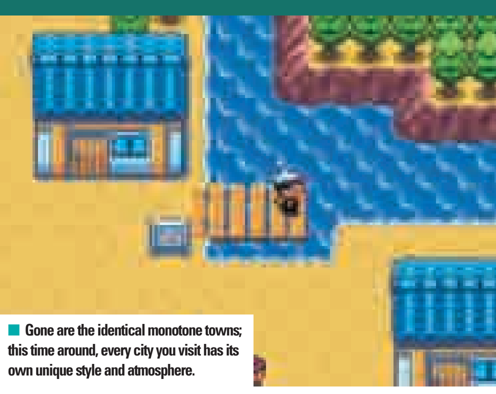


■ This funky fresh-faced female bears a scar similar to that on Vyse's face…


eMag

POKÉMON RUBY/SAPPHIRE





Gone are the identical monotone towns; this time around, every city you visit has its own unique style and atmosphere.

IT MIGHT BE SIX YEARS ON, BUT YOU'VE STILL GOTTA CATCH 'EM ALL…

DETAILS

FORMAT: GBA
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA (Japan – Out Now)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4

Pokémon is back with two concurrent games – this new version includes 100 new Pokémon, two-on-two battles and even four-player link-up play.

> "POKÉMON IS BIG BUSINESS AND NO DOUBT NINTENDO WILL REAP THE REWARDS WITH THIS ONE…"

It's about time too. Ever since the Game Boy Advance was first announced, speculation was rife that a *Pokémon* title would be one of the first games to grace its tiny screen. Suffice to say, it didn't happen – in fact, Nintendo had been very quiet on the subject up until the game's recent confirmation. Not surprisingly, catching 'em all won't be quite so easy any more – 100 new Pocket Monsters have been announced, which brings the grand total up to a whopping 351. Going from previous experience, one of these is likely to be a super-rare Pokémon only given out to winners of Nintendo-organized events; after all, it was Mew and Celebi who previously ensured feverish interest and coverage of the Pokémon brand.

Aside from the obvious aesthetic improvements, the main shake-up comes in the form of new battle mechanics. Wild Pokémon and some trainers will still be tackled in one-on-one battles, but others will challenge you in an all-new two-on-two combat system. Exactly how this works is currently unclear, but it looks set to bring a new level of strategy and complexity to the battling. What's more, it paves the way for the game's four player link-up mode, which is another first for the series. Other announcements include interactive environments (leaving footprints in sand, for example) and variable weather; this may well mean that some monsters only come out when it rains while others prefer sunny mornings. The combination of location, weather and time should make catching the cute creatures a totally new experience – something that should breathe life back into the *Pokémon* series.

In a feature hinted at by the brief animated intros in *Crystal*, each monster now has its own battle animations. There's also scope for connectivity on many levels; linking several Game Boys is an established part of the *Pokémon* phenomenon but with the GameCube and the e-Reader now on the scene, the link-up potential is huge.

After we've watched months turn into years, *Pokémon* is finally coming to the GBA and it looks as though these two adventures are shaping up to be everything we'd hoped for and a whole lot more.



Putting the Game Boy Advance's power to good use, the new battles are more colourful and lively than ever before.


eMag

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO



Capcom has done the impossible and actually improved on the visuals of the first game.

WHAT HAPPENED THE DAY BEFORE THE RACOON CITY INCIDENT?

Ask anybody about the survival horror genre and they'll almost definitely mention the *Resident Evil* series. When the original appeared on the PSone in the summer of '96, it set the scene alight. Although many of the ideas had been done individually before, it brought them all together in one genre-defining game. Eight zombie-filled adventures later, the series looks as though it may be about to hit the pinnacle of its glory with the game that explains where it all went wrong. Set the day before the now infamous Spencer Mansion incident of the first game, *Resident Evil Zero* follows the exploits of Rebecca Chambers, medic for the S.T.A.R.S. Bravo Team.

One of the most interesting features added for this prequel is the ability to switch between two characters at any time. This system, dubbed 'Partner Zapping', allows for more complex puzzles and battle strategies – you can set the aggression level of your partner as you take control of either Rebecca or Billy, a framed convict on the run. Otherwise, gameplay is exactly what we've come to expect from the series – the suspense, style and atmosphere that made previous titles so good are thankfully still abundant. Annoyingly for some, the controls remain pretty similar to those that came under fire in the first GameCube survival horror; but despite seeming a step back from *Devil May Cry*'s silky smooth controls, the slower methods work in context and can help build tension.

As is expected from a sequel (or a prequel in this case), there'll be more weapons, enemies and locations to keep you guessing as the plot unfolds. Graphically, both the rendered backdrops and the character models have been improved quite significantly; if you thought the *Resident Evil* remake looked nice, your eyes are in for a hell of a treat this time around. Provided the Partner Zapping is well-implemented throughout the game and some extra elements are added to improve and maintain replay value, this could be one of the GameCube's highlights of next year. After a favourable reception for the remake, there are going to be a lot of 'Cube owners out there who want to know more about what went on prior to the events in the mansion. The way things are going, it doesn't look as if *Resident Evil Zero* will disappoint them.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 7 March '03 Japan/US – Out Now
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

The undead are back in a prequel that explains how the virus outbreak began…

"THE RESIDENT EVIL SERIES LOOKS AS THOUGH IT MAY BE ABOUT TO HIT THE PINNACLE OF ITS GLORY"



The two protagonists team up to take on the undead. A great new feature.

Those damn zombies get everywhere…


eMag

THE SIMS



■ There's a wealth of new items for your hapless Sims to interact with.

WHO NEEDS REAL FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHEN YOU CAN HAVE THEM ON YOUR CONSOLE INSTEAD?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Maxis
RELEASE: Q1 '03
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ EA's hugely popular life simulator finally arrives on a console, complete with a whole ton of additional enhancements and extras to improve on the original PC version.

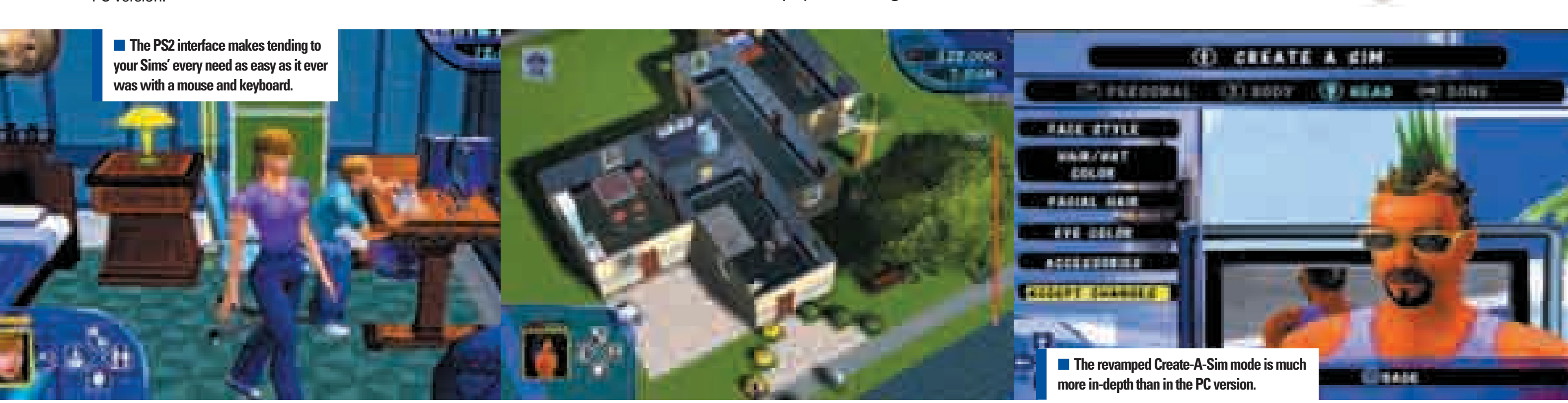
"FINALLY, THE AVERAGE NON-PC OWNING GAMER CAN HAVE THEIR OWN MICROCOSMIC FAMILY…"

Practically every PC gamer the world over will have played, seen or at least heard of the phenomenon that is *The Sims*; the life simulator by Maxis that allows the voyeuristic *Big Brother* generation to create a group of people, build them a house, get them jobs and generally meddle in their day-to-day lives. While it may not sound like much, *The Sims* proved to be worryingly addictive and its various expansion packs continue to dominate PC sales charts. But the big question is this: can the world's most popular PC game do the business on the world's most popular next-gen console?

One of the main problems that *The Sims* will face on the PS2 is the upgradability issue; with PC owners being offered expansion packs and Internet downloads, it's possible that the PlayStation 2 version may miss out. Downloadable content is possible in theory, but with online services yet to take off in the UK, such a feature is unlikely. That said, Maxis has announced that the console version will contain a good deal more props than the PC original, many of which are console exclusive. Clearly, expansion is not a necessity if there are enough items to begin with.

The game itself has undergone some changes for the console audience – a new mode adds some structure to the main game (although the open-ended original mode is thankfully still present too). New items and people are unlocked as your starting character goes about his or her almost level-based existence, progressing from singledom in a shack to the dizzy heights of suburban family life. Another surprise inclusion is the multiplayer feature; two people can now play God at any one time in the same environment and you can visit other players' homesteads by borrowing their Memory Card (*Animal Crossing* has a lot to answer for). We've also seen new Create-A-Sim options, offering greater control over the Sims – particularly in terms of heads and faces.

Provided that the new features can successfully gel with the existing formula, this new take on *The Sims* could well help to renew our dwindling faith in the series and bring the game to a whole new audience.



■ The PS2 interface makes tending to your Sims' every need as easy as it ever was with a mouse and keyboard.

■ The revamped Create-A-Sim mode is much more in-depth than in the PC version.


eMag

SHADOWBANE



Picking the character to suit you is an important element – there are many different races and disciplines…

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SHADOWBANE – WHERE RPGS AND GOD SIMS COLLIDE

EVERQUEST + ULTIMA ONLINE x CIVILIZATION 2 = SHADOWBANE

"THE RTS SYSTEM IS WHAT SHADOWBANE BRINGS TO THE TABLE OF MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER GAMES."

THOMAS SITCH, WOLFPACK

A skeleton in a fantasy RPG? Who'd have thought it, eh?

Some races, such as the Aracoix, are limited in number – they won't initially be available to everyone.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Swing! Entertainment is a well established publisher based in Germany. Founded in 1998, it has published titles across all major formats and continues to grow through its success. In fact, what was a staff of 15 several years ago has now grown to a team of nearly 50 people.

HISTORY

- **ENCLAVE** 2002 [Xbox]
- **FREAK OUT** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **BANGAI-O** 2000 [Dreamcast]

GRAB YOUR ENCHANTED BROADSWORD +9 AND GET READY TO BECOME AN EXALTED HERO…

The PC Massively Multiplayer Online RPG market is a strange one; while chock full of games to choose from, players are normally loyal to one or possibly two titles. Whether it's due to the monthly fees for such games or the sheer amount of work that has to be put into them to succeed, a new title has to be something really rather special to tear the *Everquest* junkies away from their subscriptions. Most of these games offer a similar experience – create your character, take them on quests to gain experience and become a reputed hero – but what can newcomer *Shadowbane* bring to the genre that other titles lack?

Having been in development since the late nineties, the game is currently in the process of beta testing and rather than racing to finish it by a certain date, it will be released only once certain 'release criteria' have been met. While this approach is commendable at a time when PC games are often released barely complete and later patched, the 'done when its done' attitude can often lead to considerable delays. That said, beta tests seem to be going well so hopefully *Shadowbane* will be on course to arrive early next year.

Story-wise, *Shadowbane* is pretty much unique in its field. While the basic fantasy elements are in place (world struck by disaster, blah blah…), the storyline itself is not set in stone – it's affected by the actions of every player in every town, so the game flow and the plot are constantly evolving as you play.

Dubbed 'feature characters', there are many non-playable characters populating the game world as well as other players. It's these guys that will offer you quests, trade with you and help you out when the world seems to have deserted you. They vary in importance from lowly beggars to rulers of entire areas and rather than being scripted, their complex AI means they actually live in the fantasy world of Aerynth.

Some of the more important 'feature characters' will be player-controlled by administrators to ensure that things don't get out of hand, although they won't intervene too much – freedom is a big part of this game and you won't be penalised for playing from a more evil viewpoint. You're free to sculpt your character entirely as you wish – and with ten different races, 14 classes, loads of special abilities and extensive cosmetic customisation there's a practically endless amount of character combinations.

Shadowbane is shaping up to be just the thing the MMORPG genre needs, bringing in fresh and ambitious ideas that should raise the bar and encourage other titles to go one better. For now, though, all the elements are in place to make *Shadowbane* leader of its field next year. The only major hurdle it will face is that of the user base – in the same way that the PS2 dominates the console market, *Everquest* holds a strong hand in online PC gaming. So long as it can attract enough people, Wolfpack's latest offering should have no trouble convincing converts of its prowess… it's just getting them to convert in the first place that may prove troublesome. Of course, it's rare to see a game attract a cult following before it's even released but, somehow, *Shadowbane* has done just that. All that remains is to see how it fares when it goes live in early 2003…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Swing! Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Wolfpack Studios
RELEASE: TBA
Japan/US – TBA
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: TBC

■ Another Massively Multiplayer Online RPG hits the PC with enough new features and original ideas to set it apart in a crowded genre.

PRETTY ON THE INSIDE



There's no disputing the fact that, visually, *Shadowbane* is hardly stunning, but it doesn't really matter. The order of the day here is functionality and on that front, it passes with flying colours. Allowing for hundreds of characters on-screen at once, the graphics engine clearly aims for quantity rather than quality. It makes this sacrifice to ensure the gameplay is everything it should be. It also means that the game will be accessible to a wider audience as system specification will be lower for *Shadowbane* than most other current PC titles.

"ALL THE ELEMENTS ARE IN PLACE TO MAKE SHADOWBANE LEADER OF ITS FIELD."



■ This party serves as a good indication of some of the races and classes available.

■ Ranged combatants need to travel with warriors in case things get up close and personal.

DOOM III



Don't fancy yours much – rippling muscles and infra-red eyes are the least of your worries here…

Damage models are second to none; shoot a freak in the foot and he'll slowly limp towards you or lose his balance.

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT YOU'D SEEN THE BACK OF *DOOM*…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC/Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: id Software
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-4 (TBC)

After nearly a decade of absence, *Doom* is returning – but in a form that you won't believe. Scary? Oh yes. You'd better get behind that sofa now…

> "AFTER TAKING A BIT OF A DETOUR, ID IS POINTING THE DOOM SERIES IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION"

It's not unreasonable to call id Software the founder of the first-person shoot-'em-up. Although there were a few earlier titles dabbling in the field, it was id's *Wolfenstein 3D* that truly defined the genre for the world in 1991. Eleven years down the line, id is still at the forefront of FPS gaming with the *Wolfenstein*, *Quake* and *Doom* brands continuing to thrive on every format imaginable. One thing that can be said about their games, however, is that with few exceptions they adhere to primarily action-based principles: the *Quake* and *Doom* games encourage you to shoot first and not even bother to ask questions later. Thankfully though, that trend ends with *Doom III*.

Looking at these screens, it's impossible to doubt the visual quality of the game but seeing it in motion is just something else. Animation and lighting have been developed to such a high standard that creepy, immersive in-game moments and set pieces are commonplace. Another key change is a decrease in the volume of enemies, with a few high-impact foes replacing the familiar seas of monsters. This signals a change of pace and direction for this third *Doom* title – choosing tension and atmosphere à la *Resident Evil* may not have been obvious, but it appears to have been superbly executed. This beauty comes at a cost, though; getting the game looking this good and running smoothly will require an absolute beast of a PC.

Sound is also vital to create the kind of ambience id is looking for and music is being worked on by Trent Reznor from Nine Inch Nails. Those who played *System Shock 2* will know the power of sound in causing suspense, so you'll be pleased to hear that *Doom III* is a similarly disturbing experience. The interesting thing to note though, is that since the advent of *Quake III Arena*, multiplayer aspects are taking a back seat. *Doom III* is being developed as a single player game first and foremost, so it'll be good to see where id takes it. While the Xbox version has been little more than an announcement so far, we do know that the PC version will precede it by several months. Expect more on both versions soon – in the meantime, try to get some sleep while you still can…



This lovely lighting isn't just for show – seeing shadows looming around corners can be a great early warning of impending doom.


eMag

METROID PRIME



■ The cramped spaceship environments from early screens didn't even hint at landscapes on this scale.

■ Another enormous monstrosity stands in the way of Samus's mission… best get rid of it, then.

"WE LOOKED AT THE METROID GAMEPLAY – SHOOTING THINGS IN NARROW CORRIDORS – AND DECIDED THAT A FIRST-PERSON VIEW WOULD BE THE BEST WAY TO HANDLE IT."

SHIGERU MIYAMOTO, NINTENDO

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LOOKING AT METROID PRIME THROUGH SAMUS'S EYES

SUPER METROID + HALO - XBOX PAD = METROID PRIME

■ Although combat and shooting aren't the main focus of the game, that gun on Samus's arm isn't just for show…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Retro Studios is a relatively new developer – launched in December 1998, it's owned (in part) by Nintendo itself. Based in Austin, Texas, the small development house initially had several GameCube projects on the go. These were dropped, however, so that more attention could be paid to the more important *Metroid Prime*.

HISTORY

■ **RAVEN BLADE** CANCELLED [GameCube]
■ **THUNDER RALLY** CANCELLED [GameCube]

NINTENDO HELPS TO BRING SAMUS INTO HER PRIME ON THE GAMECUBE

Taking place not long after the events of 1994's *Super Metroid*, *Metroid Prime* is the first foray into 3D for the series and it appears to have made the leap exceptionally well. While the viewpoint is, for the most part, from a first person perspective, the developers are keen to stress that this is not your run-of-the-mill first-person shoot-'em-up – instead, *Metroid Prime* is an adventure game played through the eyes of lead character Samus Aran. As the aforementioned female bounty hunter, you must investigate space pirate activity on and around the unexplored planet of Tallon IV and, as you can probably guess, it's all gone more than just a bit pear-shaped down there.

A lot of care has clearly gone into the crafting of the game's visuals – everything from the distortion caused by the curved visor to particle effects thrown around by the futuristic gizmos and gadgets is just as impressive as it is functional. From what we've seen, these showy looks don't take their toll on GameCube's hardware either – a solid 60 fps frame rate is evident throughout even the most effect-filled areas. Also refreshing is the sheer diversity of the graphics despite the fairly limited scope of the setting. With the help of some of the view-changing visors, every location looks sufficiently different from the rest to keep the player interested and inquisitive.

Controlling Samus is as easy as it should be – there are no lengthy button combos or confusing layouts to impede your performance. That said, some of the visors do alter button functions, but this is more practical than it is a hindrance and using the C-stick to change through the weapons on offer soon becomes second nature. The often troublesome FPS jumping sections are also on show, but these work surprisingly well too. One of the neatest features to make a return though is the Morph Ball – the camera pulls back to a third person viewpoint for these sections to increase visibility and reduce nausea. Rather than just being gimmicky rolling sections, the Morph Ball ability allows Samus to reach previously inaccessible areas and to complete more puzzle-led areas that further break up the shooting frenzy.

While *Metroid Prime* may look like an FPS though, you shouldn't be expecting to find machine guns and rocket launchers left lying around the levels. Instead, everything Samus needs in terms of weaponry is contained within her morphing right arm. This versatile appendage has the ability to switch between a plethora of essential tools, some of which will be familiar to *Metroid* fans (although other brand new equipment has been announced as well). Known armaments include the Wave and Freeze Beams, as well as missiles and even bombs that can be laid in Morph Ball mode. Unfortunately, Retro is keeping most of the new goodies pretty close to its chest until the game hits the shelves.

Currently showcasing a great blend of shooting, platforming and thinking, *Metroid Prime* is looking set to show the world the difference between a first-person shoot-'em-up and a first-person adventure. In this respect, there's very little we can compare it to; imagine the fusion of a more reserved shooter like *Half-Life*, with a more traditional adventure such as *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* and you're on the right track. In a refreshing change from the norm, Nintendo seems to be bringing us yet another twist on an established genre with excellent results.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Retro Studios
RELEASE: January '03 US – Out Now
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ By remoulding the *Metroid* concept, Nintendo has conceived something totally original. It's not an FPS, it's not an adventure… it's an experience.

SUPER VISOR

One of the outstanding features that sets *Metroid Prime* apart from other FPS titles is Samus's ability to switch visors. Scattered across the far reaches of the game are upgrades for her helmet that allow vision to be enhanced and extra features to be added. The basic Combat Visor allows you to lock on to targets, as well as displaying vital information and items such as maps. But it's only once you start finding the upgrades that Samus's true power is realized. As you progress, you'll get to toy with the Scanner, Thermal Vision and a Grappling Hook. Clearly, this isn't just a generic shoot-'em-up Nintendo is bringing us.

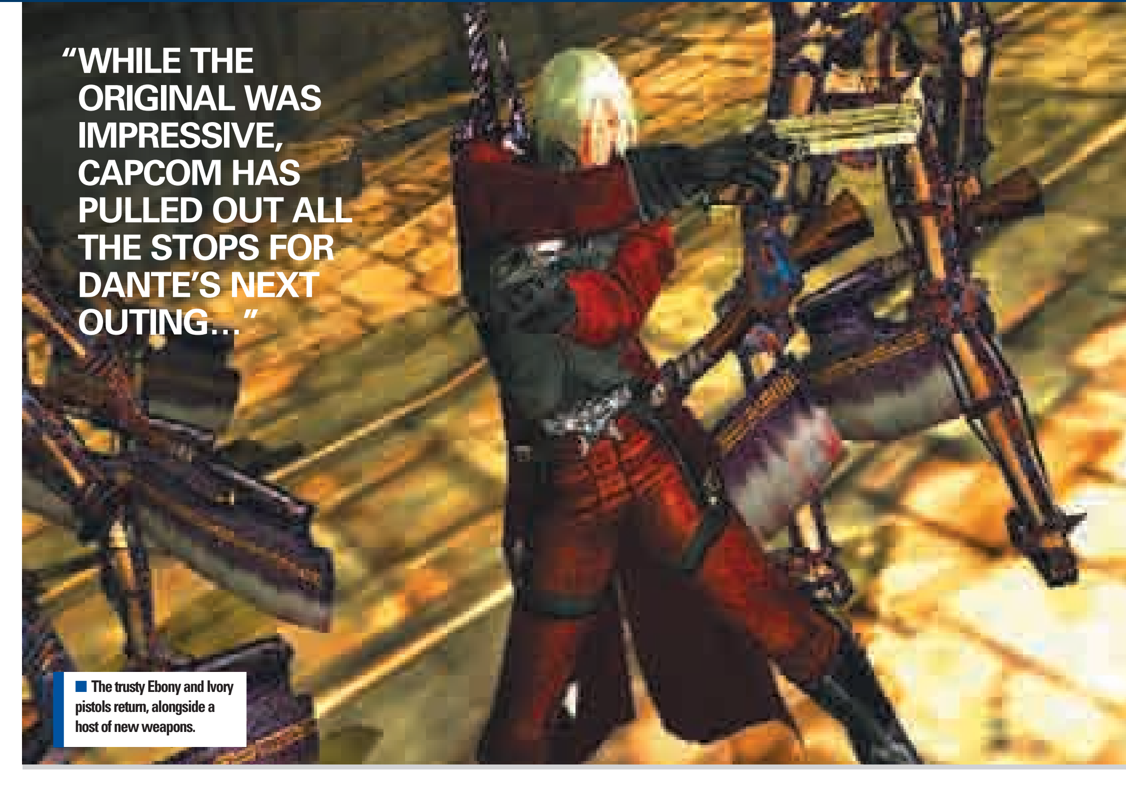
"SEEING AS HOW WE WERE TRULY WORRIED ABOUT METROID AT ONE POINT, THIS IS RATHER AMAZING…"



■ The map in the top-right corner of the visor's HUD is essential in some of the more confusing areas.

DEVIL MAY CRY 2

IT'S A CASE OF 'BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW' FOR CAPCOM…



"WHILE THE ORIGINAL WAS IMPRESSIVE, CAPCOM HAS PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS FOR DANTE'S NEXT OUTING…"

■ The trusty Ebony and Ivory pistols return, alongside a host of new weapons.

PS2 **Capcom's original *Devil May Cry* surprised many people when it burst onto the scene late last year – in stark contrast to the plodding nature of their popular *Resident Evil* series, Dante's first videogame appearance was a ceaseless flurry of guns and swords.** Despite a few minor detracting factors, the game was greeted with considerable critical acclaim – which is why it's no surprise that sequel-hungry Capcom is currently putting the finishing touches to Dante's second outing. One of the first things you'll notice is the change of setting; this time around, rolling post-apocalyptic cityscapes replace the cramped castle grounds of the first game. These currently lack the gothic architectural beauty previously on show but we've still only scratched the surface – no doubt the finished game will have the same visual impact as its predecessor. That's not to say that *Devil May Cry 2* looks bad – every care has been taken to ensure that the PS2 is given a full graphical workout.

Joining Dante this time around is a new playable female character by the name of Lucia, who can be chosen from the game's beginning. Armed with two curved blades, her action is based more around speed and fluidity than John Woo-style blasting. Each character's story is apparently different, but their paths will intertwine over the course of the game (much like in *Resident Evil 2*). Hopefully, this dual plot will work slightly better than in Capcom's zombie-filled survival horror; all signs so far point to the two storylines being separate, save for a few choice encounters.

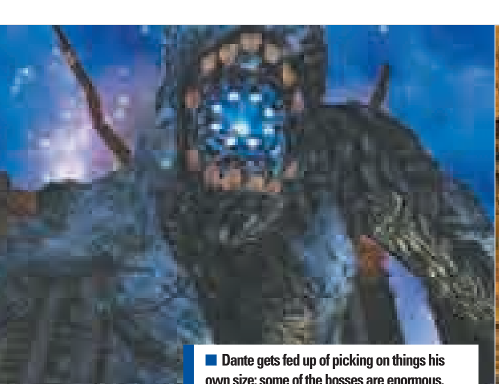
The most obvious improvement over the original is the wealth of new combat manoeuvres available. Newcomer Lucia uses a smooth combination of spinning blade attacks and martial arts, while improvements have also been made to Dante's fighting style. As well as retaining many of his old favourites, he can now run up and along walls. The main upgrade, however, comes in the form of new weapon targeting. Dante is now able to lock onto two different enemies at once and his spatial awareness while doing this is truly impressive; from off-the-cuff shots to arm-flailing, bullet-flinging show-boating – fans of the previous game's acrobatic combat will not be disappointed.

We're expecting big things of *Devil May Cry 2* when it appears early next year. The game is apparently several times longer than the first and, with the double storylines, there will no doubt be hours of action-packed gameplay to be had. Provided the longevity is ensured, Dante and Capcom will have another hit on their hands come January.

DETAILS

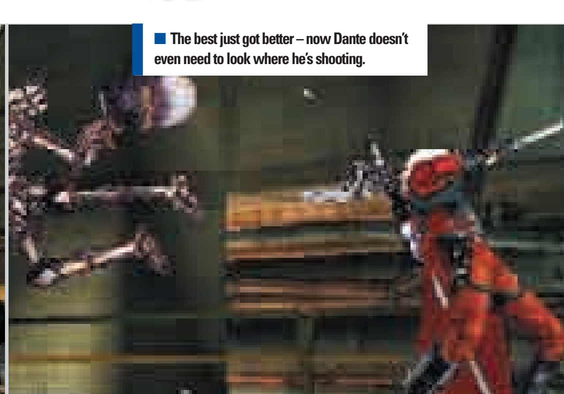
FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC (Japan/US – 30 Jan '03)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Dante the devil spawn returns for more demon-slaughtering action… but with more moves, tricks and a new friend in tow.



■ Dante gets fed up of picking on things his own size; some of the bosses are enormous.





■ The best just got better – now Dante doesn't even need to look where he's shooting.


eMag

SHOWCASE

NEXT YEAR AND BEYOND – UPCOMING GAMES FOR EARLY 2003

MACE GRIFFIN: BOUNTY HUNTER

COME IN, BOBA FETT, YOUR TIME IS UP

Format: PC/Xbox/GameCube
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Warthog Entertainment
Release: Q1 '03
Genre: FPS
Players: 1



You want originality? You got it. *Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter* manages to combine a first-person shoot-'em-up with some impressive arcade space combat and comes up with something special. One minute, you'll be exploring areas on foot with your blaster drawn, the next you'll be in your ship, flying around and battling it out with all manner of bad guys. Think *System Shock* combined with *StarLancer* and you'll get the gist of it. Promising an immersive plot, plenty of side-quests and seamless transitions between the two gameplay styles, we're already looking forward to going hands-on with the game sometime in January.

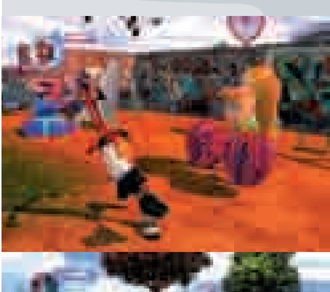
TOEJAM & EARL 3: MISSION TO EARTH

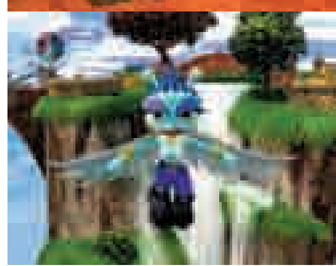
SEGA SLAM DUNKS THE FUNK ONCE MORE

Format: Xbox
Origin: US
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: Toejam & Earl Productions
Release: Q1 '03
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1-2

Anyone who owned a MegaDrive will know who Toejam and Earl are – two 'hip and trendy' aliens that garnered a massive cult following when they appeared back in 1991. Even though they weren't the most popular of SEGA's creations, the duo have been resurrected for an Xbox sequel and, not surprisingly, it's a funky affair.

Combining the style of previous outings with the mechanics of *Floigan Brothers* on the Dreamcast (another impressive SEGA title that received little attention) *Toejam & Earl 3* already has a fan base ready to buy into it… as long as they've got an Xbox, of course.





SHAUN MURRAY'S PRO WAKEBOARDER

LIKE TONY HAWK ON WATER… ONLY NOT

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Shaba Games
Release: March '03
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2



The *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series might be leading the offensive for extreme sports games, but that's not the only trick that Activision has up its sleeve. Although it might not look it, *Shaun Murray's Pro Wakeboarding* has more scope to it than the rather limited *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer*. While Kelly was restricted to riding a single wave all the time, Shaun can let go of his tow rope at any time and go exploring for as long as you can keep his momentum going. This means there's plenty of scope for exploration – which is exactly what extreme sports games need these days. As long as Activision pull it off right, this could be an interesting title…

FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE

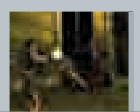
IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube/PC
Origin: US
Publisher: 3D0
Developer: In-House
Release: Q2 '03
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1

If you're of a religious or squeamish nature, look away now – *Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse* isn't for you. Set on the brink of Armageddon, it looks as though Earth has had it thanks to the arrival of the fabled Horsemen: War, Famine, Pestilence and Death. Luckily though, there's someone by the name of Abbadon (a fallen angel, no less) who can save the day.

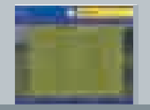
Cue over 18 levels of death, destruction, mayhem and, according to the press release, "dismemberment of body parts, realistic exit wounds, gibleting of models, dynamic holes that can be seen through, melting, and blood splatters". Blimey.





DELAYED – TOMB RAIDER

■ Although we were hoping it might hit its pre-Christmas launch, *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* has slipped into February '03. Not that we'll miss her among all the quality games, of course.



DELAYED – CHAMP MANAGER 4

■ Fans all across the country, get your pitchforks out; the much anticipated *Championship Manager 4* has been delayed until February '03. Here's hoping it'll still be bang up to date…

GALLEON

IT MIGHT ACTUALLY BE COMING OUT AFTER ALL…

Format: PS2/Xbox/GameCube/PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Virgin Interactive
Developer: Confounding Factor
Release: Q1 '03
Genre: Adventure
Players: 1



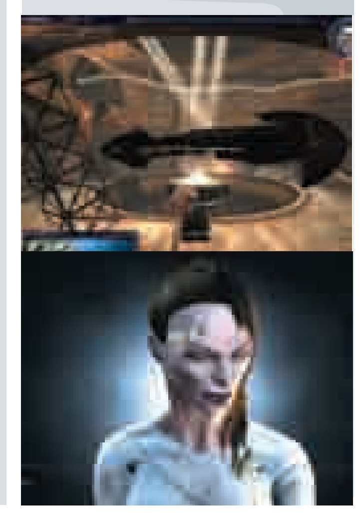
Talk about games that have slipped past their release dates and you have to mention *Galleon*. Having been in development for an absolute age, it's seen more delays than Virgin Trains in its relatively short livespan. Now though, it looks as though Toby Gard and his team at Confounding Factor are finally ready to unleash the adventures of Captain Rhama on the world; but if you're expecting a rehashed *Tomb Raider* (Gard was responsible for the original), you'd be wrong. Think more fighting, platform jumping and adventuring than ever before… let's just hope it actually comes out before we die of old age, eh?

EVE-ONLINE

OUTER SPACE IS ONLY A MOUSE CLICK AWAY

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: TDK Mediactive
Developer: Crowd Control
Release: March '03
Genre: MMORPG
Players: TBA

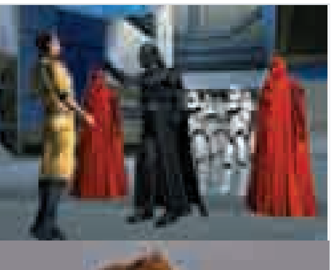
It's a fact of life that if you're going to steal ideas, steal from the best. MMORPG games might be a dime a dozen on the PC at the moment, but *EVE-Online* promises to be worth your attention by pinching from the best. Even the official press release from TDK goes as far as referring to the game as "*Elite* meets *Wing Commander*"… not that we think that's a bad thing, of course. In fact, if it turns out that *EVE-Online* is as good as it claims to be (with its five races to choose from, tons of spacecraft and other vehicles to pilot and well over 5,000 solar systems to explore), we'll be in for a real treat. This could be the game that converts us all to playing online…

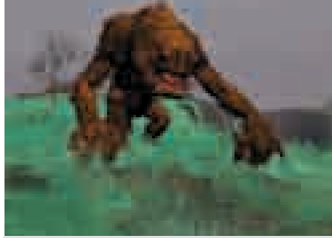


STAR WARS: GALAXIES

IT'S JUST LIKE BEING IN THE MOVIES

Format: PC/Xbox/PS2
Origin: US
Publisher: Activision
Developer: LucasArts
Release: Q1 '03 (PC), TBA (PS2/Xbox)
Genre: MMORPG
Players: TBA





Ever wanted to actually 'be' a Jedi? Well, now you can… and without having to state it as your religion on the census form as well. Although it seems like it should have been thought of ages ago, *Star Wars: Galaxies* is another of those strangely popular MMORPG games but with an added twist: it's *Star Wars*. Yes, you can pick from one of eight races and visit planets throughout the *Star Wars* universe. Yes, you can train to be a Jedi (although not surprisingly, actually achieving such enlightenment takes a lot more work than you might expect) and yes, you can go to Toshe Station to pick up some power converters. You just know this is going to fly off the shelves…

MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE

VIOLENCE JUST LIKE MOTHER USED TO MAKE

Format: PS2/Xbox/ GameCube/GBA
Origin: US
Publisher: Midway
Developer: In-House
Release: Dec '02 (PS2), Q1 '03 (Xbox/GC/GBA)
Genre: Beat-'em-up
Players: 1-2

Having been in a bit of a slump since the second game came out, Midway has finally taken the *Mortal Kombat* franchise back to its roots in order to give the fans exactly what they want… blood, and lots of it. This latest instalment offers impressive 3D fighting action, tons of special moves (including a wide variety of flesh-gouging weapons) and more messy fatalities than you can shake a spinal column at – just the thing to give the ailing franchise a good kick up the backside. With the PS2 version coming out this side of Christmas and the Xbox, GameCube and GBA ones early in 2003, you can expect to see a full review next issue.




SCORE
PLAYER
ENEMY



Whip crack away... **Super Castlevania IV SNES [Konami] 1991**

REVEALED – HOW GAMING GREW UP

OVER 20 YEARS OF VIDEOGAME EVOLUTION FROM ATARI TO XBOX. EXCLUSIVELY IN games™





THE
OLUTION
GAMING
PART ONE

HOW DID THE HUMBLE 8-BIT SYSTEMS OF THE EIGHTIES BECOME TODAY'S POLYGON-SHIFTING POWERHOUSES? AND WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GOOD NATURED RIVALRY…?

SOCIETY LOVES A WINNER. Even in a market where there is easily room for a number of similar products to thrive due to their varied outputs, modern logic still dictates that one must be better than the other. Strangely, such thinking hasn't always existed. Going back in time to the home computer era, coexistence was rife. Amstrad, Spectrum and Commodore were all in competition in a business sense, but there was very little in the way of advertising and one-upmanship such as that thrown around by today's developers. Even the Master System/NES generation was very amicable – although

THE EVOLUTION OF GAMING: PART ONE

"SO WHERE DID IT ALL GO WRONG? WHEN DID THE 'LIVE AND LET LIVE' ATTITUDE GIVE WAY TO TODAY'S CUT-THROAT APPROACH?"

Nintendo and SEGA both had consoles jostling for the lion's share of the market, there was still room for the variety and choice offered by multiple machines. Without one or the other proclaiming its prowess to the world, the two would exist side by side for their entire lifespans.

Even after that, the next generation of consoles was still fairly low-key, although there were signs of conflict brewing – large-scale advertising had begun and although it was only appearing in the specialist press, it was a good indication of things to come.

Also, allegiances had started to form both between hardware and software companies and between the buying public and the consoles themselves – a fledgling market that had been through a few terrible times was really starting to come into its own. As weeks rolled into years, more consoles came and went but the two big companies remained strong and grew more competitive as time went by, even if they never actually came to blows.

So where did it all go wrong? When did the 'live and let live' attitude give way to the cut-throat approach seen so often today? Between companies switching sides, switching off, buying out and selling out, there's a hell of a lot more to the modern games industry than just games.

The market today is a very tactical one, where good business sense is as important as a good product and this can be pinned almost single-handedly on one company: Sony. You see, the declaration of war, as it were, can be traced back to the time surrounding a single event… the birth of the PlayStation.

THE SONY INVASION

Originally designed as a Super Nintendo expansion unit to show Sega that a CD add-on could be successful, the PlayStation X (as it was then known) was such a burden in development that Sony soon worked out that it would be far more sensible to turn it into a stand-alone console.

Realising something was awry, Nintendo investigated and found that the cause of the delay was that Sony was working on its own piece of hardware. The SNES-CD deal was immediately given to rivals Phillips, even though there had been no breach of contract by Sony.

Following the nasty split from Nintendo, Sony decided to play the firm at its own game by developing the 16-bit CD add-on into a freestanding entity; thus, the PlayStation was born. Whereas other consoles previously had slipped onto shelves overnight though, Sony took a vastly underused approach to launching a new machine – marketing.

The flurry of publicity that surrounded the release of Sony's first effort took the world by storm – never before had a console had such extensive advertising and, despite the fact that the adverts themselves started pretty poorly (such as the awful S.A.P.S. TV campaign, for instance), they did the trick. Sony also roped in some high profile developers to make sure the games themselves were up to scratch.

Arcade legends Namco brought coin-op favourites such as *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken* to the little grey box, while long-time developer Psygnosis delivered sleeper hits *Wipeout* and *Destruction Derby* that made the PlayStation an essential purchase.

Within a few months, Sony had turned the market on its head. Gaming stopped being a pastime relegated to bedrooms across the world and became an accepted and fashionable activity that appealed to a wider audience than ever before. The war had begun.

THE BATTLE FOR SQUARE

With the gloves well and truly off, other companies had to fight back in order to compete with the buzz that Sony had created. Admittedly, Nintendo did a little advertising for its N64 console and the key titles; but no one could match the initial hype from Sony, who continued to pull aces from up its sleeves.

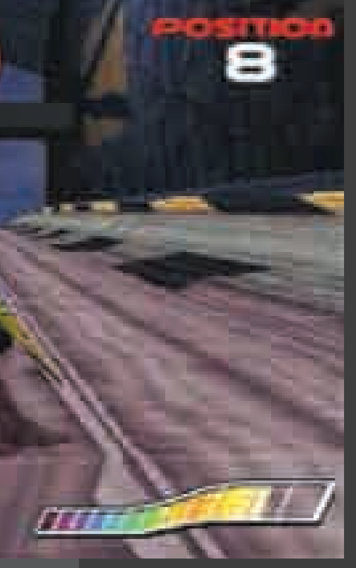
The next of these was their allegiance with Japanese RPG giants Squaresoft. Disappointed with Nintendo's choice of cartridges rather than CDs for its 64-bit machine (as well as snubbing of its new title, *Final Fantasy VII*), Square took its long-running *Final Fantasy* series on its first PlayStation outing at the end of 1997.

Claims that the cartridge format was incapable of handling the various elements of *Final Fantasy VII* were perfectly founded; the high-quality rendered backdrops and hours of FMV cut-scenes spanned a whopping three CDs. The N64 only once came close to this quality towards the end of its life with *Resident Evil 2*, but even that was nowhere near the scale of the Squaresoft epic.

Much to the annoyance of Nintendo fans the world over, *Final Fantasy VII* went on to be considered one of the finest RPGs ever crafted. Once again, a Nintendo decision had backfired, allowing Sony to pick up the pieces – this time, the result was a split from a high-profile developer after ten years of loyal service.

As the years went by, Sony bought into Squaresoft more and more to keep them developing exclusively for the PlayStation.





Psygnosis's *Wipeout* helped the PlayStation so much that Sony almost needed the developer on board. So Psygnosis was bought out by Sony.





"ALTHOUGH NINTENDO AND SEGA WERE COMPETING, THERE WAS STILL ROOM FOR VARIETY"

It's questionable whether the PlayStation would have been a success without Namco – its coin-op ports brought arcade-quality titles into gamers' homes.

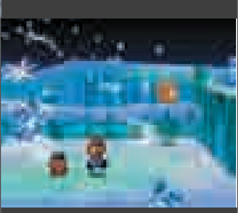
After sticking with Nintendo for ten years, Square's move to a new console, and a different company, was a big surprise for many gamers.



Super Mario RPG was a joint effort between Nintendo and Square. Released on the SNES towards the end of the machine's life, the game never made it to the shelves in the UK.

Square's breakaway title, *Final Fantasy VII*, needed to be something special to maintain the company's reputation. Luckily, it was a true gaming masterpiece and a commercial success.

As a result of the Square/Nintendo split, the sequel to *Super Mario RPG*, *Paper Mario*, was developed solely by Nintendo. It was a great game, but lacked Square's magic.



EXTINCT

SEGA

A casualty of the hardware wars after four generations of consoles, SEGA bowed out of the hardware market with the Dreamcast. After years of producing more than capable rivals to Nintendo's NES and SNES in the Master System and MegaDrive, SEGA's first major downfall came with the Saturn.

An unfortunate piece of hardware, it specialized in 2D visuals just as the world was embracing the extra dimension. Although it impressed when first released, the machine soon suffered a double blow at the hands of Sony's superior 3D hardware and the marketing steamroller that heralded the PlayStation's arrival. The Dreamcast took bad luck to the next degree – failing despite being a technically superb console that could produce visuals to rival even its assassin, the PlayStation 2.

The Dreamcast was swept aside by the marketing tidal wave that accompanied the release of Sony's second console even though there was no shortage of excellent games on the SEGA console. It also excelled in terms of being the first online console.

But at the end of the day, the lack of publicity (and the PS2 hype machine) stopped the Dreamcast market dead in its tracks. Thankfully, SEGA continues to develop quality titles across all major formats… so perhaps their abdication from the console market is more a blessing than a curse.

THE EVOLUTION OF GAMING: PART ONE

"BY BECOMING A MULTI-FORMAT DEVELOPER, SEGA WAS DOING WHAT WAS NECESSARY TO KEEP THE COMPANY ALIVE."

Today, after dozens of quality Square titles, Sony is a main shareholder in the legendary RPG developer. Although this doesn't give them absolute power (as recent announcements of GameCube and Game Boy Advance titles prove), it does give Sony a good amount of control over what Square can and can't do. As the war rages on, Square will be a valuable weapon for those lucky enough to wield it; this, at the moment, is everyone bar Microsoft.

SEGA SWITCHES SIDES

With all the recent talk of Nintendo calling it a day in terms of hardware after the GameCube runs its course, we're reminded of the last company to make this decision – SEGA. After a decent enough start in the market with the Master System and MegaDrive, SEGA hit a shaky patch around the Mega-CD, 32X and, to a slightly lesser extent, the Saturn.

And while the Dreamcast was expected to do great things, it performed reasonably but failed to reach expectations. It came as a surprise to gamers and the industry when SEGA announced that it was to end production of the Dreamcast and release no further consoles; many speculated that this decision would be the death of SEGA.

Within a matter of months, the unthinkable was already happening; the firm's long-standing mascot, Sonic The Hedgehog, was to appear in a brand new title for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Immediately, accusations started flying that SEGA had 'sold out'. In fact, Nintendo's former arch-rival had merely become a multi-format developer and was doing exactly what needed to be done to keep the company alive in the new console climate.

The lack of a piece of hardware to concentrate on also allowed SEGA more creative freedom than ever before. More projects have been announced for Xbox, GameCube, GBA, PlayStation 2, arcade and even mobile phones than would have been impossible to conceive had SEGA had its own console to worry about as well.

Thankfully, the games it churns out continue to be of the same high standard as ever before – the likes of *Super Monkey Ball* and *Jet Set Radio Future* are unquestionably SEGA and undeniably brilliant.

It does beg the question though; would another developer like Nintendo be able to replicate its success if they were to follow the same path? Such actions could surely only lead to a single conclusion: the single format.

SURVIVAL OF THE RICHEST?

Leaving just Sony and Microsoft to go at it surely wouldn't be the best of moves for the industry – two companies with so much money to throw around would surely leave each other no option than to either work together on an über-console or to outbid each other to the top, snapping up any developer they can.

Many consider this to be the way Microsoft already operates, but this isn't exactly true; in fact, their recent buy-out of Rare was their sixth largest acquisition to date at $375 million. Although it ranked as one of the worst kept industry secrets in recent times, it wasn't until X02 earlier this year that Microsoft officially confirmed the deal.

The age-old developer (formerly Ultimate Play The Game in the home computer era) was 49% owned by Nintendo before the takeover. Despite releasing a few classic titles on the N64 though, Rare often came under fire for poor productivity, with some later games being in production for far longer than planned.

Their final title for a Nintendo home console, *StarFox Adventures*, is a fitting testament to the fine work they did – after all, it manages to squeeze all things Rare onto one tiny disc. Whether they can work the same magic for Microsoft remains to be seen but with the American giant's support, the answer is almost surely going to be yes. Whatever they produce, the purchase was not in vain – an important developer has been snatched away from a rival, so Microsoft win either way.

Judging from past experience, it's impossible to predict where the market is headed. The only thing that could possibly quell the wrath of the raging marketing and purchasing war would be a single format. As it stands, Sony's PlayStation started an avalanche that continues to snowball out of control to this day.

It's hard to imagine these companies working together a single format, but by the same token consider this: would you have predicted ten (or even five) years ago that SEGA would ditch consoles to become a multi-format developer? Would you have considered Sony a threat within the console market? And Microsoft's recent foray into the gaming world would have surprised many people.

When the big guns stop firing and the smoke clears, we see that the games industry is among the most unpredictable markets out there. Technological advances, an unstable world economy, changing (and more demanding) consumer tastes… the list of variables is endless. In fact, fair to say that the only certain thing about gaming is uncertainty itself…

EXTINCT



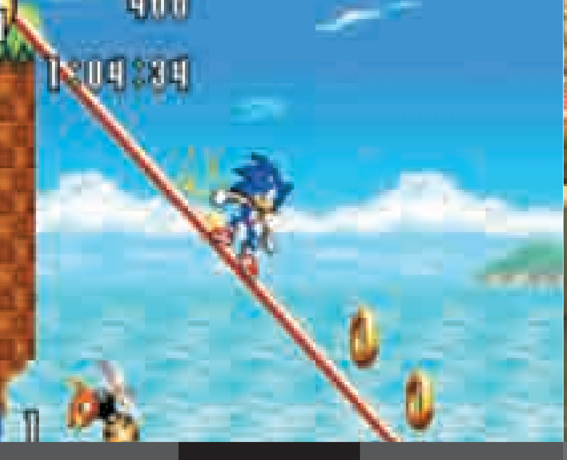
SNK

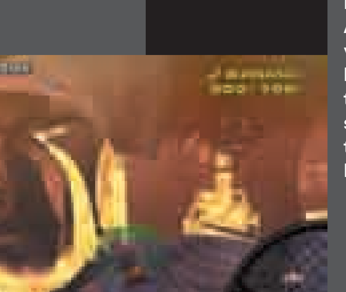
One of the key figures in 2D gaming, SNK's Neo-Geo home consoles never really hit the big time. A hefty price tag for games and machines meant that not only was it out of many peoples' price ranges, but it was also a considerable risk for potential stockists; the danger of having a £200 game sitting on a shelf indefinitely is unquestionable.

Despite having some astounding franchises to its name (*Metal Slug*, *Samurai Showdown* and *King Of Fighters* all being among the finest), third-party support was minimal for the home machines. It was hoped that the Neo-Geo Pocket (and later the Color version) could aid the cause, but this wasn't to be. The Game Boy (and all its variations) had full control of the handheld market and SNK's accomplished effort was a commercial failure. Following this final flop, SNK closed its European and American offices in June 2000, with the Japanese base going the same way just over a year later.

But if you think that you'll never seen the SNK name again, you're wrong. Having recently been bought up by Playmore, many titles that would never have seen light of day are now planned for release.

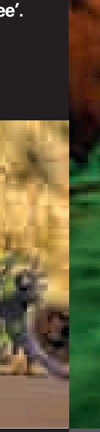
Furthermore, there could even be life in the old dog yet – Playmore recently made the brave move of re-opening the SNK US offices. No-one knows what will come of this, but if nothing else, it's heartening to see the legend receive a new lease of life.





SEGA's mascot on a Nintendo console? A few years ago, you'd have been laughed out of town for even suggesting such a thing could happen. But it did.

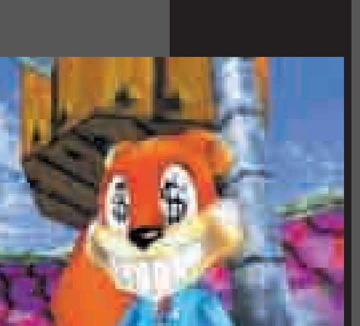
SEGA continues to bring its franchise up to date on next-gen consoles. *Toejam And Earl* and *Shinobi* are getting 21st Century facelifts.

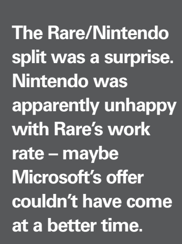


SEGA is showing its commitment to developing innovative titles like *Super Monkey Ball* for the 'big three'.



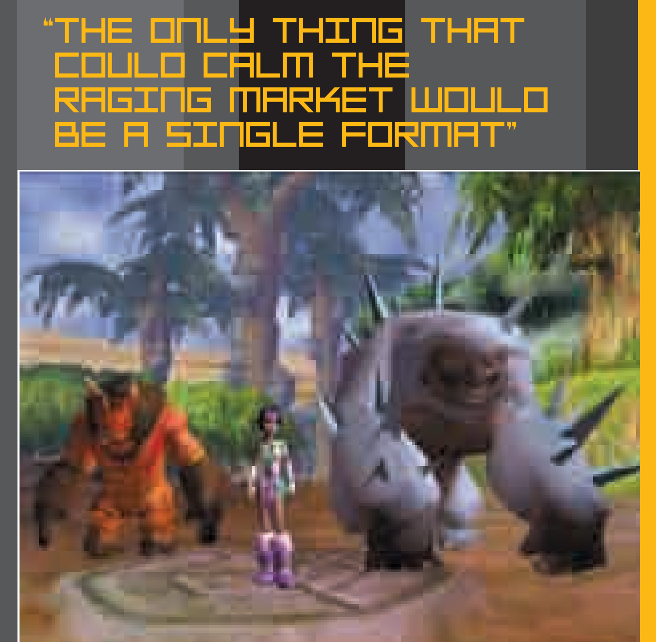
Banjo Kazooie was arguably Rare's finest hour during the Nintendo years. *GoldenEye* and *Perfect Dark* weren't bad either…





The Rare/Nintendo split was a surprise. Nintendo was apparently unhappy with Rare's work rate – maybe Microsoft's offer couldn't have come at a better time.

"THE ONLY THING THAT COULD CALM THE RAGING MARKET WOULD BE A SINGLE FORMAT"



EXTINCT



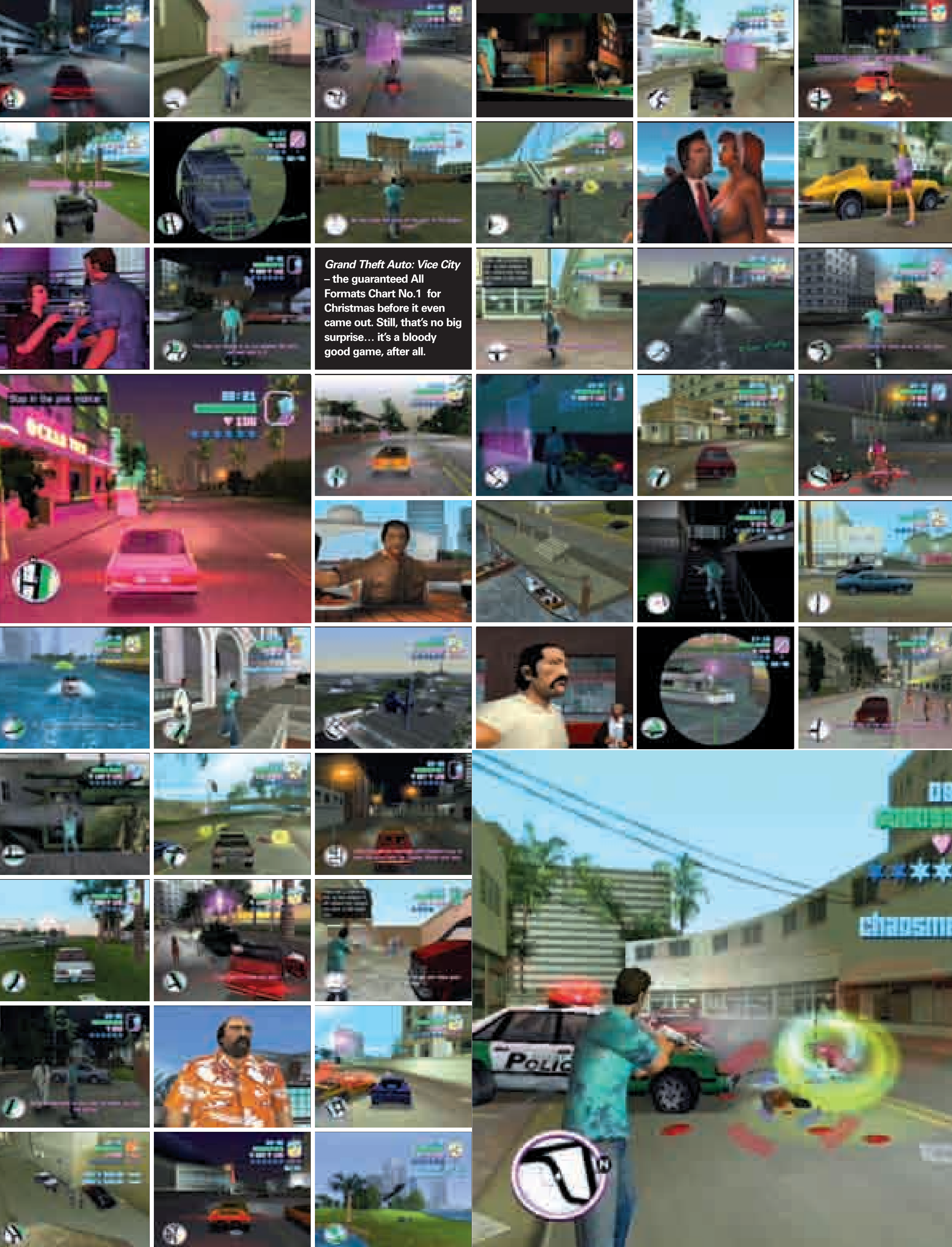
ATARI

Despite being one of the founding fathers of home gaming, time has not treated Atari well. While the VCS was revolutionary (in that it made gaming accessible to everyone from their own armchair), Atari's focus soon turned to home computers rather than consoles.

It's for this reason that it came of something as a surprise when the Jaguar console was unveiled in 1993. Bereft of notable software support, it wasn't long before the world's first 64-bit console disappeared as quickly as it turned up in the first place.

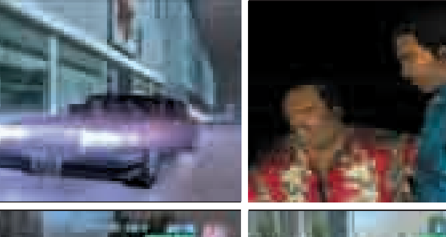
This came as no great shock, however – Atari's previous jaunt into the console market was the equally ill-fated Lynx handheld, which just helped to prove that the Game Boy had the handheld market well and truly sewn up. Atari more or less accepted its fate after its failed console efforts and despite a few games slipping out, it was mostly quiet on the Atari front until Hasbro snapped up the rights to remake popular titles like *Pong* and *Missile Command* in 1998. Nowadays, the Atari brand remains only in name – while games like *V-Rally 3*, *Splashdown* and *Stuntman* still appear wearing the Atari logo with pride, they have nothing to do with the Atari of yesteryear (the logo also crops up on the sort of T-shirts worn by people who want to look retro but probably aren't old enough to remember the VCS).

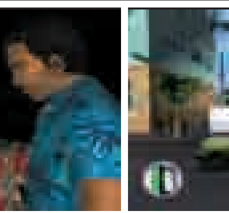
Sadly, Atari as a company is dead – buried now alongside several million copies of that rather dreadful *ET* game…

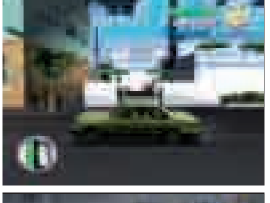


Grand Theft Auto: Vice City – the guaranteed All Formats Chart No.1 for Christmas before it even came out. Still, that's no big surprise… it's a bloody good game, after all.

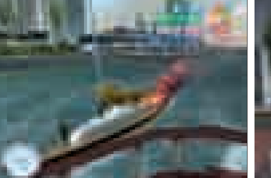




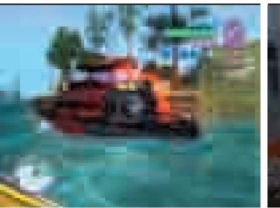




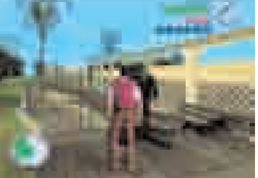


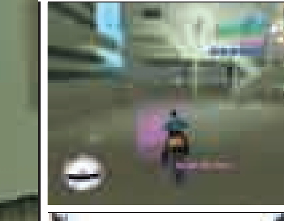




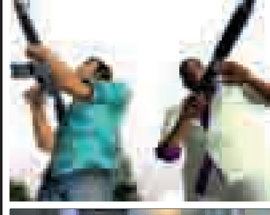








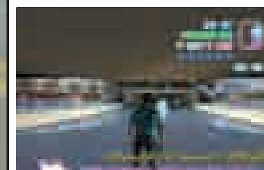


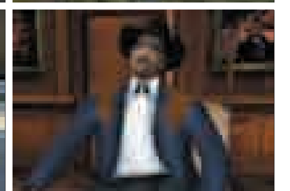








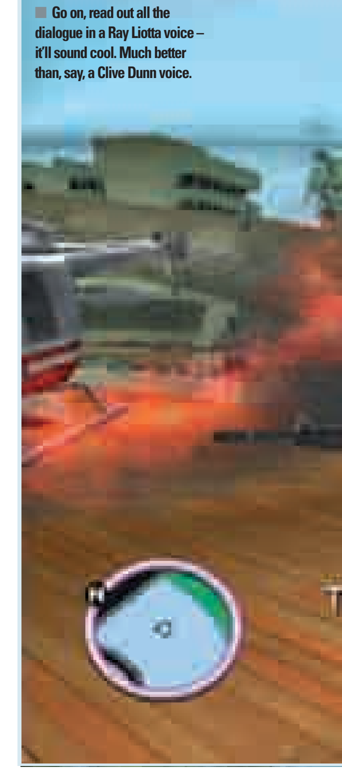


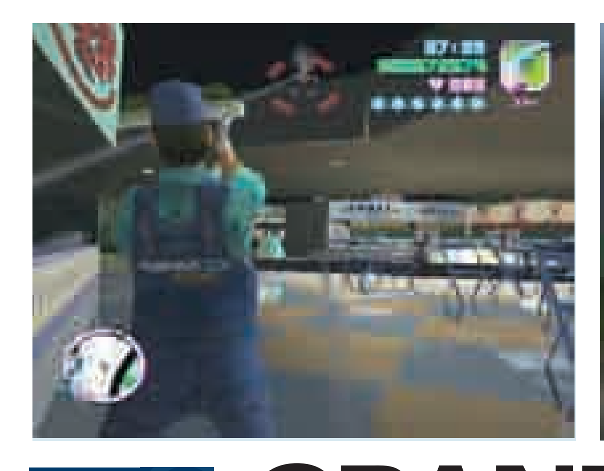


REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, *games™* is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score… we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.


Go on, read out all the dialogue in a Ray Liotta voice – it'll sound cool. Much better than, say, a Clive Dunn voice.





DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Take 2 Interactive

DEVELOPER
Rockstar North

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

BETTER THAN

JUST LIKE


GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

GRAND THEFT AUTO:

PASTEL SUITS, BIG HAIR AND A SHOTGUN. GTA GOES EIGHTIES AND THE SCORES GO THROUGH THE ROOF.

A few seconds after this peach of a game begins to boot up, you know that it's been developed by people who *understand*. First, up comes your standard publisher title card – no smiles there. But then there's a head-stretching grin the moment the flashing cursor begins to write 'LOAD "VICE CITY"', followed by 'PRESS PLAY ON TAPE'… and in the background you can just make out Buggles singing *Video Killed The Radio Star*. This had a direct emotional (but internal) effect on the people in the office who also understand. And when the screen's borders started to flash and an 8-bit Rockstar North logo appeared to the synthesised sounds of the CMB 64's SID chip, the same people actually laughed with what must have been joy. It is doubtful that this has ever happened before and it may never happen again.

Basically, *Vice City* is *Grand Theft Auto 3* set in the Miami of the1980s. Hence we have Buggles (1979); hence we have the CBM 64 screen (1984); and, after a fair amount of PS2 loading (long enough to load up a real 64 from tape), we have the game. And it's not 1986 that we're thinking about – it's November 2001. But this didn't provoke the level of scepticism that you'd get, say, by playing this year's *FIFA* game. Oh no, it felt good, if not bloody brilliant. But this is no mere update of a tired formula; *GTA3* still hasn't been beaten by any other game in its field because it invented its own field. No, things may be similar but they are still reassuringly different. There is now a more structured narrative and where you previously played a silent, unnamed character, this time you're Tommy Vercetti (voiced by Ray *Goodfellas* Liotta). Giving the central character a personality could have put a barrier between the player and their immersion in the game, but it doesn't. It makes it all the more enjoyable just to hear what Tommy has to say. Vercetti isn't a lowlife criminal and when we meet him he's powerful enough to pull off a cocaine deal. The opening scene shows this deal going horribly wrong: goons turn up, shoot our (anti)hero's buddies, hightail it with the loot and suddenly Tommy is down, but not out, in Vice City.

The aim of the game is the same as it always was, but now when you make your play to takeover the metropolis, you really do. The



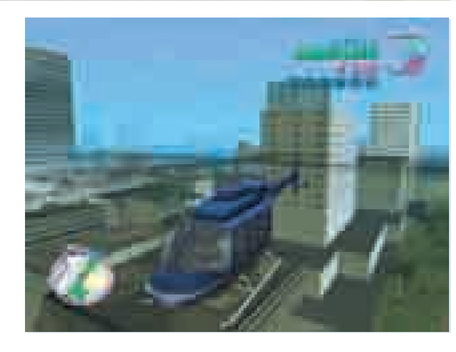
■ Clothes can be changed by visiting relevant stores. Remember, this is the eighties – image is everything, style isn't.



VICE CITY



■ The Katana can remove a head with one well-timed blow and alternates between a swiping or stabbing motion.



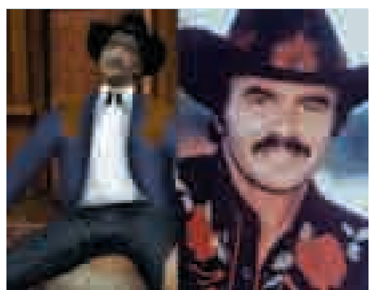
FLY-BY KILLINGS

Early trailers of *Vice City* showed Tommy Vercetti piloting a helicopter while firing a Mac-10 machine pistol out of the window. When we first found a helicopter on the roof of recently deposed (read 'shot to death') Cuban crimelord Ricardo Diaz's mansion there was but one trick on our minds. But in order to shoot left or right in a car you need to use the R1 and R2 shoulder buttons – in the 'copter these now govern the rotation of your whirlybird. So it seems like this rather desirable feature has been dropped due to control issues. You can fly anywhere in the city but the taller skyscrapers are higher than your altitude limit. But let's not complain too much since this new transport technology does provide some excellent sniping possibilities.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
NEED FOR SPEED: Vehicle handling has been improved and the motorbikes are inspired.
FUSED: Racing, role-playing and a lot of shooting. Nobody does it better.

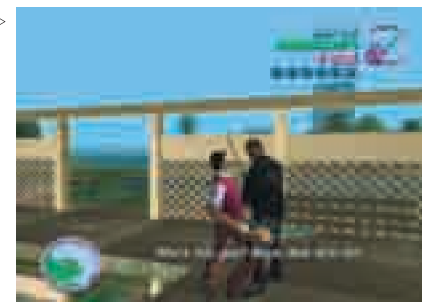
Every vehicle handles in its own way. This handling will change if a wheel is shot out

The Spaz-12 repeating shotgun can destroy a car in seconds so keep your distance or feel the burn.

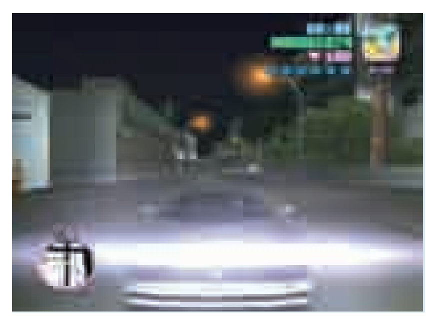


YOU WORK FOR ME NOW

***Vice City's* supporting characters are extremely well characterised. Not surprising since they're voiced by some extremely hot talent that includes Dennis Hopper, Lee Majors, Deborah Harry, Tom Sizemore, ex-porn star Jenna Jameson and *Miami Vice's* Philip Michael Thomas. Cut-scenes may not make a game, but here, thanks to some inspired scripting, they enhance the feeling of being in a world that's a perfect blend of *Scarface, The Fall Guy*, and *Miami Vice*. With a world this believable you see the game's main players as an ensemble cast rather than a collection of polygons. A crossover between films and games? Almost.**



The chainsaw can be smuggled onto the golf course. Enjoy it...



Two men in pastel suits in a sports car – *Miami Vice* wasn't this good.

"THIS GAME HAS MORE TO OFFER THAN A MELODIC AND VIOLENT TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE."

curious pleasure of beating someone to death, waiting for the paramedics to arrive and resuscitate them only to beat them to death again, is still there. Only this time you'll do it to a soundtrack of Michael Jackson's *You Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'*, Cutting Crew's *(I Just) Died In your Arms* or Foreigner belting out *Waiting For A Girl Like You*. Indeed, the radio stations are nothing more than a miracle of expert licensing. Not only do most of them seem to go perfectly with whatever you're doing, their inclusion may be tongue-in-cheek. They also bring back happy memories – this reviewer hadn't heard *Japanese Boy* since it was on the radio in 1981. And when he heard it, he just had to find a Japanese tourist as quickly as possible and run them over several times. Amateur psychologists, draw your own conclusions; professionals, you're wrong.

But the game has more to offer than a melodic and violent trip down memory lane. You can also buy property, among other things. This new 'Monopoly' element doesn't just act as a minor distraction, it's tactical – buying locations gives you another place to save the game, or extra garage space for your favourite cars. Buy a business and it will start earning money so you don't have to – you'll begin to be able to enjoy the game without having to worry so much about your bank account

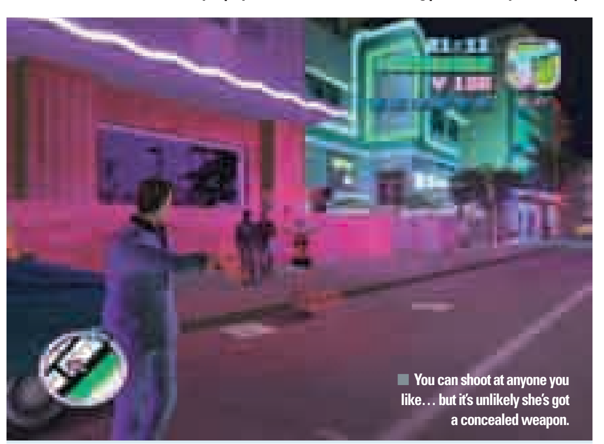




Cheat codes let you play as different characters including porn star Candy Suxx, complete with minigun.



Go on! Run over those soldiers! And then run over them some more until you get khaki puree. Mmm, puree…



You can shoot at anyone you like… but it's unlikely she's got a concealed weapon.

FAQs

Q. JUST MISSIONS?
Nope – you've also got the hidden packages and stunts from the first game to do as well.

Q. ISN'T THERE A CHEAT THAT LETS YOU URINATE ON PEOPLE?
We heard that rumour too… but no, we don't think there is. Sorry.

Q. CAN I GET THE SOUNDTRACK?
Yes, you can – there are seven CDs available, each one representing a different radio station.



You get to steal a tank again, but this time it's protected by armoured vehicles and military personnel.

Mission wise, it is only why you are performing missions that has changed much since you're still either killing people, driving to locations within time limits, following cars, collecting cars or taking part in races. But this is of little consequence since it is how these missions are carried out that is the highlight of this title. We now have the ability to shoot out car tyres – therefore directly affecting how they handle the road. Windscreens are no longer made of indestructible glass so you can kill the driver by blasting them while they're in the car and watch as their body tumbles out of the vehicle to the ground. Motorcyclists can be kicked off their bikes while they're in motion, then you can get on their machine and ride it away. The game features a collection of bikes from scooters and scramblers to choppers.
They handle extremely well and burning round the city at top speed feels just like you always knew it should, but have never been able to experience (until now). What's more, you can use your pistol while riding. So the motorbikes are a welcome addition, what about the brand new helicopters? Yes, there are helicopters and they require a moderate level of skill as well as both analogue sticks.

So there are new vehicles to play with, and properties to buy as well as new weapons including tear gas, a minigun and a chainsaw that's more amusing than it is efficient. And we haven't even got to the interior locations. The Village People dance on stage at The Malibu Club as polyester clad revellers get down with the funky music. You can kill them all. One crime lord owns a mansion that, after you've been flown around it in a helicopter while slaughtering his henchmen with an M-60, you wander round and wage war in, just like in the final scene in *Scarface*. Then there is the shopping mall and our dreams are complete…

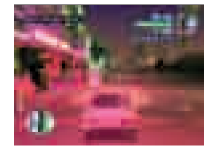
While *Vice City* essentially follows the same template of *GTA3*, where you work for bosses and assert your power over a city, it feels like a more complete, larger experience. Admittedly, the 'on foot' sections could have done with a slight tweak and auto-aiming for hand-to-hand combat would have been a definite boon. But take away these minor problems and you've still got a phenomenal piece of all round entertainment that surely must act as a wake up call to all other console game publishers on the planet. This series gets consistently better with every outing. And this version sold one million units on day one in the US. Come on gents, aren't all those ringing tills worth the extra effort? Can't we have more games that are this good?



24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

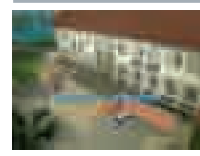
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM…

00:10 MINUTES



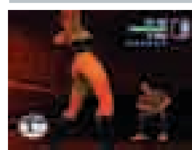
The 'getting to know you' period allows you to acclimatise yourself with the controls and the city without stopping the progression of the story.

10:00 HOURS



Who you work for depends on how far you are in the game, but by this time we had opened up the city, owned property and had plenty of weapons. Look at that fancy pad.

10 DAYS



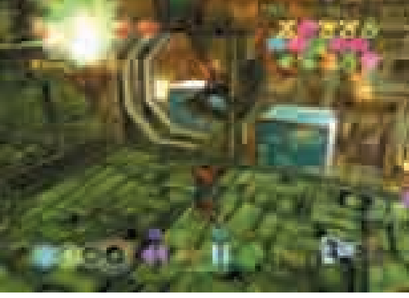
You own the city, but that doesn't stop you having fun. You can visit your strip club, you can fly your planes – it's like the toybox lid has come right off and the toys are all yours…

VERDICT 9/10

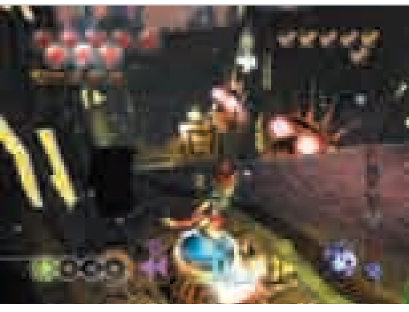
STYLE AND SUBSTANCE – UNLIKE THE EIGHTIES…



All the Time Monsters need to be destroyed in order to activate the goal to each level. Suck items in and fire them back at the bad guys.



Swinging blades may normally be a dangerous obstacle, but earn a Pause control and getting through them becomes a piece of cake.



While *Blinx* may include many unique features, regular platform antics, such as pressing switches, are still very much part of the mix.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Artoon

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

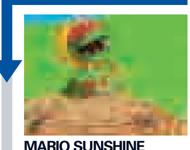
PLAYERS
1

CRASH BANDICOOT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MARIO SUNSHINE

CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT, TIME TRAVEL BROUGHT IT BACK

BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER

Going on first impressions alone, it's easy to look at *Blinx* and dismiss it as a ropey American attempt to mimic a little of Nintendo's magic. For starters, there's an obvious similarity to *Luigi's Mansion* on GameCube – both games have the hero using a vacuum cleaner as a means of destroying bad guys. Then there's the lead character himself; a cat called Blinx who bears more than a striking resemblance to Accolade's *Bubsy The Bobcat* and seems just as staid as far as design goes (but would Mario be half as popular if he was introduced to the market today? Probably not…). But these are only the first impressions and, like a lot of good games, the true innovation doesn't become apparent until later on. In fact, there are a lot of things that aren't immediately obvious about this platformer. For instance, despite having a distinctly Western look, *Blinx* is actually the product of new Japanese developer, Artoon… bet you never saw that one coming, eh?

Ever since Xbox was unveiled, the games industry has been hyper-critical about every move Microsoft has made – mostly because of the company's initial hype about their technology rather than the software. We've been told time and time again that the hard drive will revolutionise console gaming although, until now, it's hardly been more than a glorified memory card. The arrival of *Blinx*, however, marks the beginning of the second generation of Xbox software and provides the first solid evidence that Microsoft was telling the truth about Xbox. How? Well, as you play the game, the hard drive records every move you make – the idea being that you can rewind or fast-forward your actions to increase your chances of completing the level. This is regulated by six Time Controls – Rewind, Fast-Forward, Pause, Record, Slow Motion and Retry – which are earned by collecting groups of colour-coded time crystals.

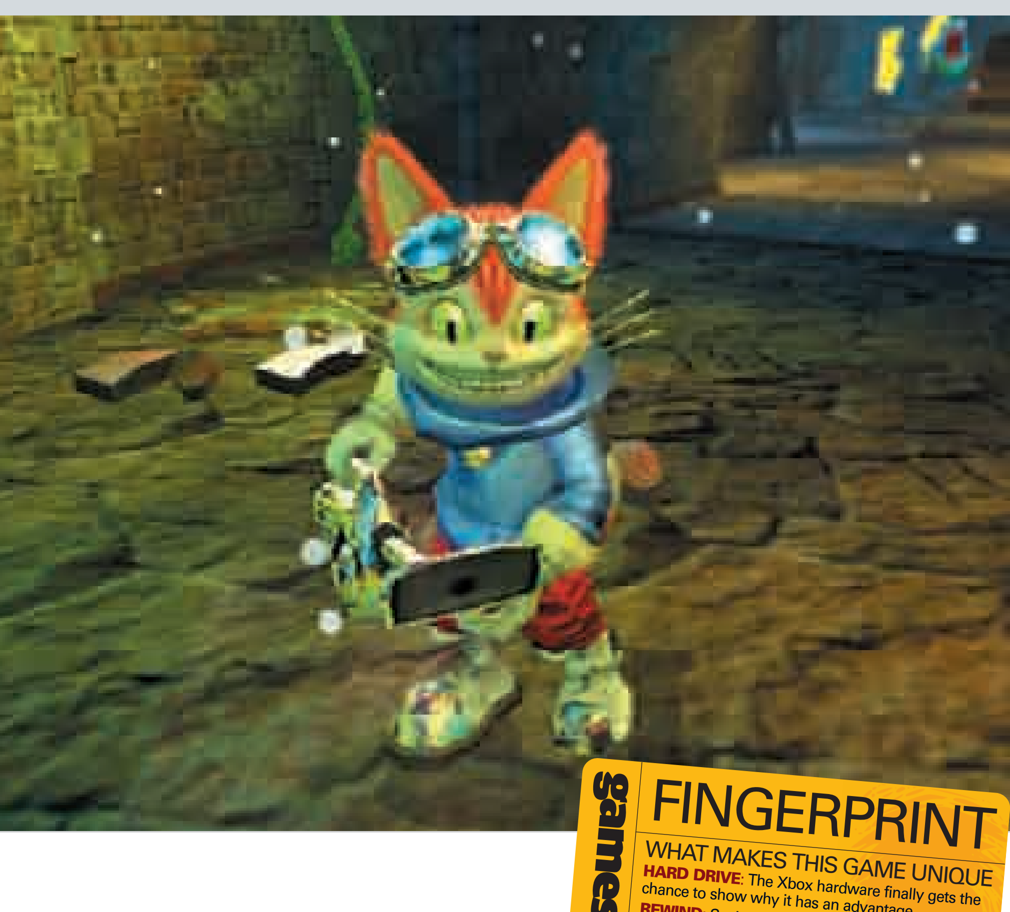
Once a Time Control has been earned, it's simply a case of holding the B-button to bring up the Time Control options before selecting the one you wish to use with the left analogue stick – and this is where *Blinx* becomes incredibly clever indeed. Using a Pause Control,

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
Nine different worlds, with three main stages and a boss battle in each one.

Q. REPLAY VALUE?
Improvable grades at the end of every stage and secret medals offer plenty of value for money.

Q. ARTOON WHO?
Formed by a breakaway group of programmers from SEGA and headed up by ex-SEGA director Yoji Ishii.



FINGERPRINT

games™

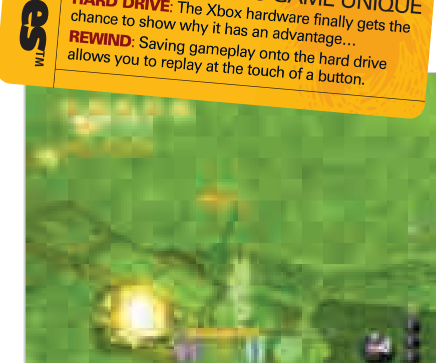
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HARD DRIVE: The Xbox hardware finally gets the chance to show why it has an advantage…

REWIND: Saving gameplay onto the hard drive allows you to replay at the touch of a button.

for example, completely freezes everything that moves in the game, including pendulum blades, explosive barrels and any bad guys that may be lurking nearby. You then have ten seconds in which you can destroy the stationary baddies or make your way past lethal pitfalls with a minimal risk of failure. Similarly, a Record Control lets you record yourself performing an action for ten seconds, thereby giving you two characters to complete a single task, such as tipping a see-saw. Because of these rather complex features, the main objective has been kept simple – you just have to destroy the specified number of Time Monsters to power up the exit, where you're awarded with a ranking for how quickly you've completed the level.

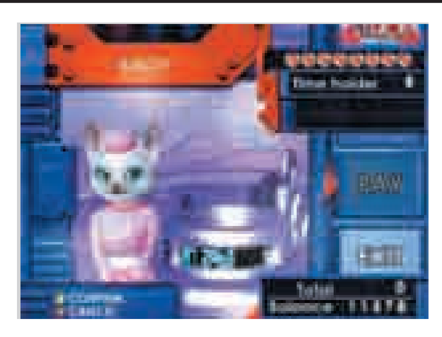
But for all the clever innovations Artoon has introduced, there are an equal number of flaws. For instance, there are some serious camera problems that remove much of the polish – you can actually run right off the screen and get killed in some areas, simply because the automatic lock-on won't re-adjust until you've destroyed whatever it happens to be focusing on at the time. This tends to be particularly problematic in small rooms, as it's easy to get jammed in the corner while the camera frantically tries to lock-on to whichever bad guy it thinks is closest. And this isn't the only problem – sometimes it's possible to get completely stuck in a level, either by taking a one way short-cut before you've destroyed all the Time Monsters, or running out of Time Controls in a section



Collect three or four green time crystals and you can record your actions, giving you the opportunity to work alongside yourself on puzzles that require more than one person.

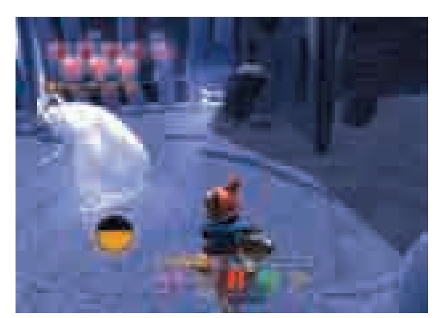
pivotal to completing the stage. The graphics are a bit disappointing too, with a choppy frame rate and some rather dodgy textures – perhaps a downside to the fact that everything is being saved onto the hard drive in real-time.

Despite the numerous problems with the design and the technical side of the game, even the most frustrating aspects can't stop this from being fun to play. The surreal settings and bizarre imagery create an atmosphere not unlike *NiGHTs: Into Dreams* on the Saturn and, just like that obscure SEGA title, *Blinx* also has the ability to make you pick up the pad and try again – even if you're at your wits' end with a particularly tricky segment. *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* is a flawed work of genius, but with so much going in its favour it will, no doubt, achieve the long-term cult following it deserves.



WOULD YOU LIKE A BAG?

There are nine different areas in *Blinx* and each has its own shop where you can spend gold collected in the levels. Among the items on sale are new vacuum cleaners (including level-specific models with the ability to suck up sand, water or fire); bigger vacuum bags for holding more items; extra life and Time Control holders and even designer clothes. Some items are in limited supply and soon go out of stock, while others, such as health refills, can always be purchased prior to starting a level.



Using a Pause while attacking a bad guy can make things a bit easier – especially if it's a creature that chases you around the level like this frog.



Rewinding time can be pivotal to completing a level. A broken bridge can be restored simply by turning back the clock.

VERDICT 6/10

A NOVEL IDEA, LET DOWN BY POOR EXECUTION



FAQs

Q. WHY THE 18 RATING?
The high violence and blood content, combined with the swearing, makes this a mature game without question.

Q. NO MULTIPLAYER?
Bits pulled the multiplayer, as it said making it good enough would have caused the game to slip into 2003.

Q. WHERE'S BRUCE?
Like Tom Cruise, Bruce Willis sadly doesn't allow his image to be used in videogames.

DIE HARD:



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Vivendi Interactive

DEVELOPER
Bits Studios

PRICE
£39.99

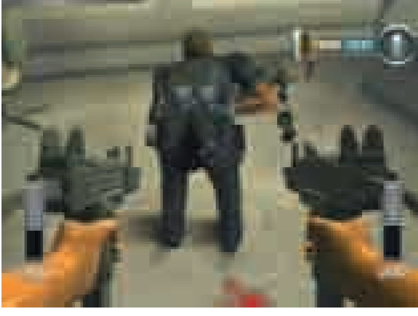
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

If you want to be a successful first-person shoot-'em-up in today's rather crowded market, you've got to have a hook; that special little something that makes you worthy of people's attention. *Doom* was revolutionary, *Half-Life* offered an absorbing storyline, *Quake III Arena* took the deathmatch concept to a whole new level, *Halo* had the AI thing going for it… and the list goes on. So, given that *Die Hard: Vendetta* is up against some stiff competition and has been on many gamers' 'most wanted' lists for absolutely ages, what does it have to give it the edge over its rivals? Well, aside from a Bruce Willis impersonator and a ton of swearing… er, absolutely nothing.

While virtually all the plus points of *DH: Vendetta* can be listed on the back of a postage stamp, the faults are horribly obvious and far too plentiful. For instance, the visuals just aren't up to the standard that we know the GameCube can handle. The textures are bland and every level seems to lack the attention to detail that we've seen in recent titles. Of course, this may be because Vivendi is planning a PS2 version of the game and doesn't want to annoy PS2 owners by having to downgrade the graphics too much. Saying that though, current favourite *TimeSplitters 2* managed to look pretty damn good across all formats without much modification, so why *DH: Vendetta* couldn't do it with a bit of work is anybody's guess. However,

Capping innocents isn't the best way to get through each level successfully… even if they are members of the Village People.



Fancy popping a cap in someone ass? Best practice on this guy, then. Like shooting fish in a barrel…



VENDETTA

WE'RE SURE BRUCE WILLIS WOULD BE MORTIFIED…

the way the game looks is the least of *DH: Vendetta*'s worries. It falters heavily on the gameplay front as well. True, there are a number of interesting elements that seem like they might raise the bar for FPS games: the ability to take people hostage, wear disguises to avoid attention and switch into 'stealth' mode are all quite innovative for the genre. However, the fact that these ideas only occasionally come into play means that they sound a lot more impressive than they actually are.

Furthermore, *DH: Vendetta* suffers heavily from what we call '*Rick Dangerous* Syndrome' – a problem first seen in the 1989 platform game of the same name. Much as *Rick Dangerous* featured a truly devious style of gameplay (make a mistake and die, remember to get past original mistake before making another and dying again, repeat ad infinitum), so too does *DH: Vendetta*. It punishes you over and over for making stupid little mistakes. Take saving the staff at the Chinese Theatre, for instance: there's a group of them in one room but as soon as you enter the corridor nearby, the order goes out to 'waste the hostages'. Which room are they in? Oh, too late, they're all dead. Maybe it's this room? Nope, dead again. This one? Yep, but you were too slow. Do it again and this time you'll kill the wrong terrorist, because there's another one behind the door… and so on. This isn't the only example, there are dozens of sections like this. Add the fact that some of the puzzles are solved in the most obscure way (find the key in the toolbox that looks like background scenery to turn on the generator, that powers the crane, that moves the pipe, that lets you reach the raised platform… bah) and you'll soon get very, very fed up.

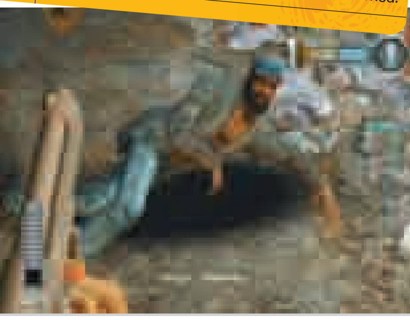
As the icing on the rather sour cake, *DH: Vendetta* features no multiplayer mode whatsoever. Naturally, we can appreciate the tough decision that Bits Studios had to make when it came to removing the multiplayer aspect of the game to get it out in time for Christmas as promised, or allow it to slip into next year while they made the multiplayer mode good enough. However, the fact remains that to have a bad multiplayer mode is unforgivable, but not having one at all simply leaves *DH: Vendetta* unable to compete with virtually every other console FPS out today.

Considering that *DH: Nakatomi Plaza* on the PC was also a pitiful attempt at an FPS with the *Die Hard* license tacked onto it, we had hoped that Vivendi might have learnt from its mistakes. Instead, *DH: Vendetta* just makes a new set of blunders while looking like a low-end Dreamcast game. What a waste.

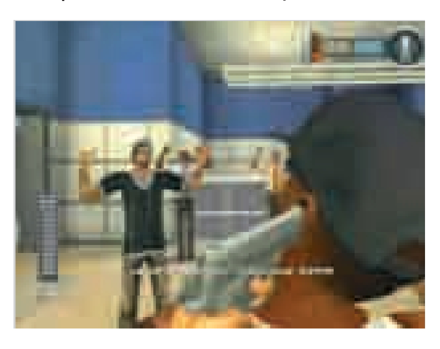
VERDICT 4/10

FRUSTRATING AND POORLY EXECUTED. A BIG LETDOWN



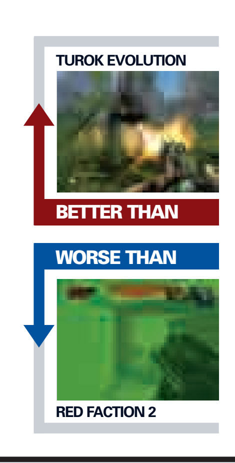


Innocent people react differently if you're packing heat; these bums, for example, will cause a ruckus that alerts nearby terrorists.



CAPTIVE AUDIENCE

Although running around with your guns blazing is all very macho, there are times when a bit of diplomacy is needed instead. Say, for example, you need to get information from some gang members – blowing them all away isn't going to be the best way to get it out of them. That's why *DH: Vendetta* lets you to take hostages. Using stealth mode and a gun, you can sneak up behind an enemy and take him unawares. If you've got the right man, everyone nearby will drop their weapons and you can go about your business… right after you've popped a cap in their asses, of course.



HE'S GETTING ON A BIT, BUT TONY'S WHEELS JUST KEEP ON ROLLIN'…

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 4

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Neversoft

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (1-8 Online)

TONY HAWK 3



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

AGGRESSIVE INLINE

Although it's a given that all developers want the games they create to be the cream of the crop, it must be a real bugger when someone actually comes up with the game that beats everything else out there. Think about it – how difficult must it be to develop the greatest game in one particular genre, take a month or two off… and then have to start again to make a sequel that's even better than the original? It's not something we'd fancy doing; but then seeing as how *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* is quite possibly the greatest skateboarding game ever (an accolade that all three of the previous *THPS* games have held in the past), it's clear that the folks at Neversoft aren't finding it that hard a task. Maybe there's something in the water…

So, this is the fourth game in the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* series – surely they must be running out of ideas by now? Well, apparently not. Despite following a similar formula to the other games and then hanging several bells and whistles on it, *THPS4* still manages to be a bigger and more enjoyable experience than *THPS3*… which was better than *THPS2*… which was better than *THPS*. Go figure. What stands out most in the new and improved *THPS4* though, is that this isn't just another game in the series with all the usual subtle tweaks and slight alterations that the other games saw. Instead, *Aggressive Inline* – the near-miss challenge to Mr Hawk's 'Best Skating Game Ever' crown – has obviously forced Neversoft to give the game a more enthusiastic kick up the arse.

At first glance, *THPS4* looks absolutely no different from the last PS2 incarnation – and for the most part, you'd be absolutely right. To be fair, there wasn't really much that could be done to *THPS3* to make the game look even better; the skater models were detailed enough to look suitably realistic (even if every other character you met appeared to be made of cardboard), while the levels were large and actually looked like the places where they were supposed to be set. That's why it's no surprise to see the same (if slightly improved) engine being used for the follow-up – so far, so similar. Instead, the important

FAQs

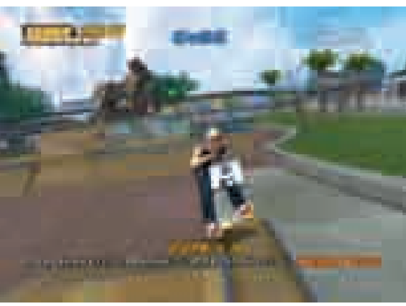
Q. HOW MANY CHALLENGES?
There are 190 Pro Points in the game – one for each attainable goal.

Q. ANY NEW CHARACTERS?
Only one; the legendary Bob Burnquist makes a welcome return.

Q. LOADS OF SECRETS?
Not as many as last time, but you can use your cash to buy extra levels, decks for your board and clothing.



Skitching an elephant might look like fun, but we doubt you'll be able to try it yourself. London Zoo probably has some kind of law against it…



Don't try this at home, kids – only trained professionals can ride skateboards backwards *and* create bangin' tunes at the same time.



Some of the goals sound hard, but aren't – for example, cleaning all the bird crap off this pier only requires a simple (but rather long) grind.

ENHANCED

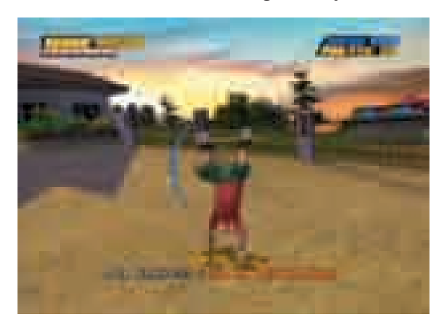
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

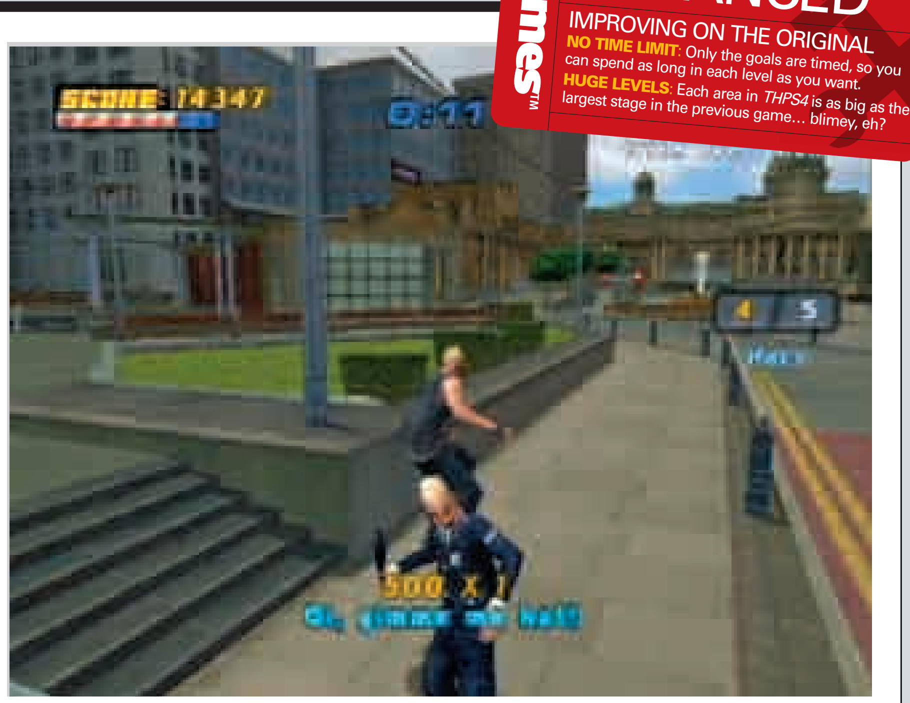
NO TIME LIMIT: Only the goals are timed, so you can spend as long in each level as you want.

HUGE LEVELS: Each area in *THPS4* is as big as the largest stage in the previous game… blimey, eh?

THE PROFESSIONALS

Instead of having set goals à la *THPS3*, people are dotted around the stages (handily singled out with big arrows) and talking to each of them reveals a challenge. Each stage has around 16 amateur goals, with more unlocked as you complete later levels. Complete enough of them and you'll be offered the Pro Challenge for your particular skater, which then gives way to a whole bunch of even harder Pro goals. Needless to say, these are some of the toughest things we've ever seen in a *THPS* game… perfect for hardened fans who want something to really test them.





Not surprisingly, the London level is exactly as the Americans would imagine it – the place is swarming with cockneys, coppers and red buses.

changes featured in *THPS4* are very much to do with improving the gameplay. Familiar elements such as the two-minute time limit and ten rigid (and near identical) goals per level have been stripped out, leaving room for a far more open and relaxed game structure. On top of that, you've also got a variety of new moves that we last saw in *Aggressive Inline* – spine transfers have now been added, as well as the ability to bail out of a vert jump if you're going to land with a concussion-causing crunch. However, it's with the levels that the biggest enhancements have been made… and we do mean big. Each of the nine stages on offer – seven basic and two secret – are absolutely huge, which gives you plenty of scope for exploration and finding those super-long lines. Believe us, you're going to need them when it comes to completing some of the Pro Challenges…

Despite all this new brilliance though, one of the major sticking points in the game is something that up until now has always managed to impress – yes, it's the extensive range of music that accompanies the action. In the past, we've always managed to find plenty of tunes that stood out from the rest but this time around almost every track on the list seems rather mediocre and samey. Even the offerings from the bands we know and like – such as System Of A Down and Goldfinger – aren't really ones that we might have wanted to hear. In fact, the only mildly encouraging thing is the resurgence of a decidedly 'old-skool' vibe… hey, any game that manages to squeeze in tunes from AC/DC, Iron Maiden, NWA and The Sex Pistols can't be all that bad.

Of course, the annoying thing about the *Tony Hawk* series is that each game is a bit too good for its own, er, good. Anyone trying to find fault with them usually ends up picking holes in the smallest things like (yes, we admit it) the musical line-up. When it boils down to it, there's no doubting that this new instalment of *Tony Hawk* just about manages to scrape it as *the* definitive skating game out today… and that's after we've taken the shockingly impressive *Aggressive Inline* into account as well. Not surprisingly though, there is one downside to all this: with *THPS4* now on the shelves and impressing gamers everywhere, we're waiting with baited breath for Neversoft to announce *THPS5* some time in the coming months… and then we'll have to go through this all over again. Damn their eyes.

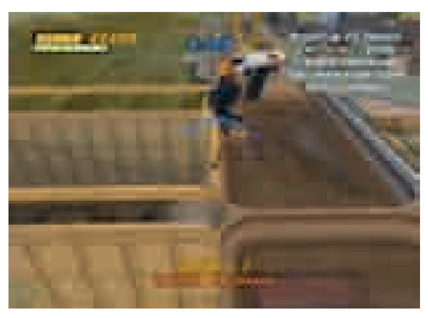


VERDICT 8/10

HOW ON EARTH ARE THEY GOING TO TOP THIS?

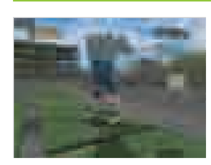


The flatland trick system has been modified, so now you can pull off some remarkable combos… ever seen a 3600° (no, really) Pogo before?



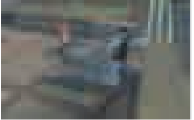
A lot of goals need you to pull off particular moves while doing something else, such as holding a lip invert while riding a moving bowl.

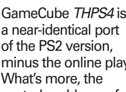
XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



Aside from slightly improved graphics, the biggest plus point of Xbox *THPS4* is the ability to record your own music onto the hard drive and then import it into the game. Handy.

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



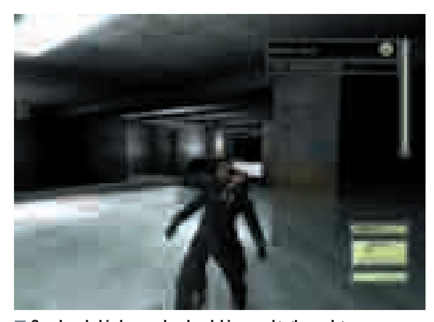


GameCube *THPS4* is a near-identical port of the PS2 version, minus the online play. What's more, the control problems of *THPS3* remain, as the button configuration is the same.

GBA £29.99 OUT NOW



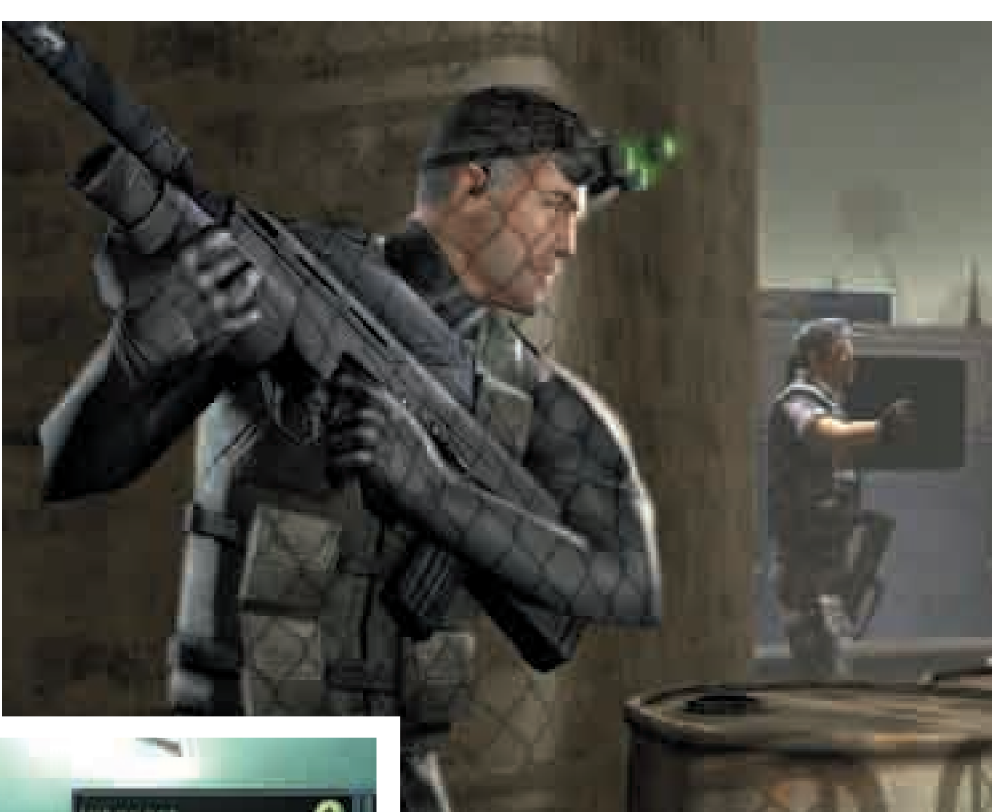
Obviously, GBA *THPS4* is tailored for the handheld but it's got elements of the PS2 version while using the same engine as the last GBA outing did. An enjoyable little game.



Sneak up behind a guard and grab him round to the neck to get him to talk.

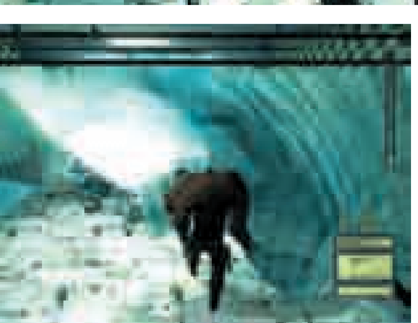


A well-placed zip line is the only way for Sam to get into this burning office block. The levels can be a little linear in this respect.





Oi, show some respect! Terrorists can strike at any time, in any place – even a morgue.



If you knock out any guards you'll need to hide their bodies in a dark corner. If anyone else finds them they'll raise the alarm.

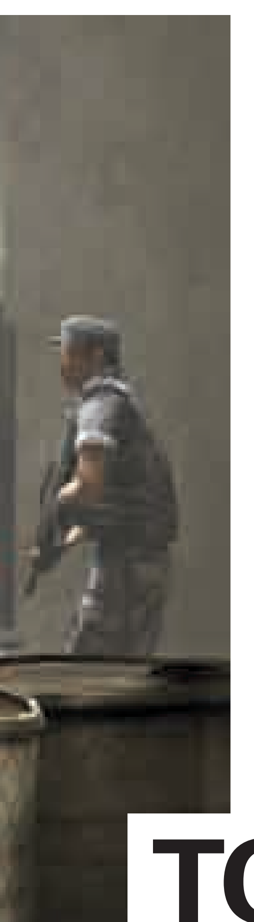
It's amazing how interactive the scenery is; curtains fold realistically over you as you walk through them.



games™ GLOBAL

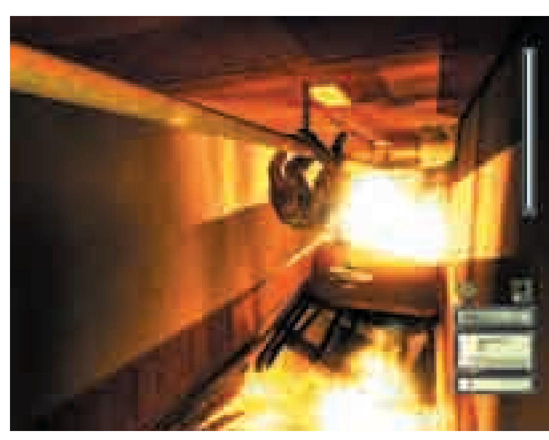
TAKING GAMING ONLINE

EXTRA LEVELS: Ubi Soft has confirmed that you'll be able to download new levels when Xbox Live launches next year. No details are confirmed yet, other than the fact that the downloads will be free.



IS THIS REALLY THE GAME THAT METAL GEAR SOLID 2 SHOULD HAVE BEEN?





TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL



When the name Tom Clancy appears in the title of a game, you can pretty much guess the sort of thing it's going to be – he's a man synonymous with realistic portrayals of war. Surprisingly though, you can forget the usual army tactics and first-person shooting here as, thanks to the imagination of Ubi Soft's Montreal studio, this Tom Clancy game leans more towards the *Metal Gear Solid* way of doing things. In fact, it's so much like *Metal Gear Solid* that Hideo Kojima himself has spoken of his fondness for the game, even suggesting that some of the most innovative new features were originally planned for *MGS2*, but had to be cut because the PS2 hardware simply couldn't handle them. But while this title initally looks like an *MGS2* clone, further inspection reveals that this is actually much more comprehensive as far as stealth-based adventure games go.

You control Sam Fisher, a field-operative with the secretive NSA sub-agency Third Echelon, as he goes out to neutralise terrorist activities in America. While the basic premise doesn't sound too dissimilar to *Metal Gear Solid,* it soon becomes clear that Ubi Soft has taken a much more realistic approach towards the life of a secret agent. Who could forget *MGS2*'s far-fetched storyline and introduction sequence with Snake's balletic bungee jump in the rain? Thankfully, *Splinter Cell* steers clear of such artsy nonsense and begins with believable characterisations of Sam and his superior in talks about the activities they're about to undertake. Sunlight pours through the window casting light and shadow over the characters and the banks of computers around the room, giving an indication of the sort of impressive graphics techniques you'll see throughout the game.

Starting at his top secret headquarters, Sam is updated on the current situation and is asked to complete two refresher missions to convince the big guns that he's in good shape. Of course, this is simply a stylised tutorial, teaching the player the basic moves and button configuration while introducing the rules and themes that are evident right from the word go. It really needs something like this to ease players into the game – not because the controls are overly

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Canada

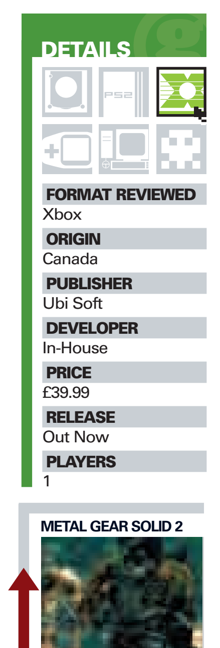
PUBLISHER
Ubi Soft

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1



FAQs

Q. LOTS OF CUT SCENES?
There are cut scenes between each area, but not any that break up the action mid-level like in *Metal Gear Solid.*

Q. CAN YOU SHOOT CIVILIANS?
No, doing so will result in mission failure – you're a good guy.

Q. FAVOURITE MOMENT?
In one section, you get the opportunity to flood a room by shooting at a fish tank – then you can then use your zapper to electrify the floor and kill everyone on it.





games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LIGHT WORK: Dynamic lighting and shadow-casting make this look more advanced than similar games.

GADGETS: *Splinter Cell* is bursting with secret agent gadgets, including a camera that sticks to the wall.



LET THERE BE LIGHT

There's no doubt that *Splinter Cell* is one of the most gorgeous looking games around. Even so, there's one visual element that not only stands out for its looks, but also for the way it affects the gameplay. The lighting effects are awesome – sunlight streams through windows, flames tint everything with a glow of orange and swinging ceiling lights cast moving shadows throughout the room. Of course, where there's light, there's dark and this is where *Splinter Cell* really comes into its own. Light bulbs can be shot out, throwing the area into darkness and confusing any nearby guards… then all it takes is one sharp clout round the head and it's goodnight Gracy.

complicated, but because there are so many interactive elements that need to be highlighted. It's here that you get your first taste of how sound and light affect the way soldiers, guards and civilians react to you. Shooting out the lights, for example, will make you pretty much invisible to cameras and other people, though you'll need to wear your night vision goggles if you're to see where you're going. Similarly, moving slowly reduces the noise your footsteps make, thus increasing your chances of sneaking up behind a guard. The only thing that's slightly misleading is that everything is laid out conveniently for training purposes – a single camera in a room, a solitary guard patrolling a doorway and so on. But things get more interesting once you get into the first real mission.

After the fairly sedate nature of the training missions, the first few levels feel incredibly daunting. While most of the moves you make are fed to you via your communication headset (which keeps progression a little more linear than we'd hoped), you get the feeling that danger is lurking around every corner. And it is – whether it's the flaming rafters of an office complex, a group of armed terrorists or a two hundred foot drop onto solid concrete, there's always something for you to worry about. Escaping from a burning building without falling off the roof isn't particularly tricky (unless you're a complete fool), but taking out guards can be more troublesome. While you can get through many tricky situations simply by creeping through the shadows, there are times when you have no choice but to use your gun. Not surprisingly, the best way of doing this without getting caught is to remain hidden in the shadows, line up your sight and take out each target with a single bullet to the head. But it isn't so simple when you're facing more than one foe at a time – the first shot alarms others, who often seem to instinctively know your exact position and take you out with a ridiculous level of accuracy. These situations are made even more infuriating by the fact that your own targeting is slightly out of alignment. Bullets are in short supply too, so wasting two or three on a task that should only take one can seriously affect your progression later on.

Thankfully, the slight flaws with connection and artificial intelligence only occur every now and again – the rest of the game is every bit as good as we've all been led to believe. Possibly the most talked about feature has been the number of gadgets on offer, but we're pleased to report that this is an area of the game that really sets it apart from its rivals. Locked doors can be opened with a lock pick, high walls can be scaled with a grappling hook and potentially life-



The lock pick is one of the most useful gadgets in the game.

The light from a TV screen casts a shadow of Sam on the wall.



GO GO GADGETS

This game includes just about everything a budding spy could ever need – whether it's night-vision goggles, fibre optic cameras, electric zappers or lock picks, they're all here. The best part is that you'll actually need these to make it through the levels. Of course, with so many items to choose from, things could easily get confusing, but the title is user-friendly: goggles are available at the touch of a button and everything else is neatly listed on an inventory screen.

"UBI SOFT HAS SET OUT TO DO SOMETHING FAR MORE COMPLEX THAN ANY OTHER DEVELOPER HAS TRIED BEFORE"

threatening situations can be checked out in advance with a choice of miniature cameras. The great thing is that the levels have been designed to introduce these gadgets one at a time, giving the player a few chances to get used to using one before moving onto another.

This is helped further by the way the missions suddenly change direction as you complete each specified task. For example, a mission to retrieve data from a computer terminal may suddenly unfold into something much more complex once you've found what you're looking for. Because of this sporadic progression, you're really kept on your toes and never know what puzzle you might face next. Of course, the communication link with HQ means you're constantly fed new information via your headset and are made aware of the most severe upcoming situations in advance. You're also informed of breaking news that relates to your mission, which helps to give the impression that you're part of something much bigger.

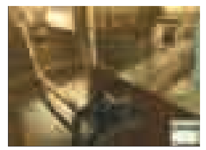
But, while the quirky gameplay elements and solid storyline are sizeable achievements in themselves, it's the visual side of *Splinter Cell* that deserves the most praise. The astounding lighting and shadow-casting techniques give the game a unique depth quite unlike any other title. Polygons are used effectively, textures are as crisp as can be expected and even unimportant background elements have an unprecedented level of detail. The look is rounded off perfectly with some of the most inventive animation we've ever seen, our favourite part being the way Sam flicks his head forward to bring down his night vision goggles when his hands are full. It really is a sight to behold.

We do have one reservation – we can't help but feel that this has been rushed for a pre-Christmas release. The visuals are certainly very polished and the clever little gameplay innovations very nice, but the occasional problems with collision detection just seem like something the programmers didn't have time to iron out. That said, Ubi Soft has set out to do something far more complex than any other developer has tried before and, while a couple of areas fall slightly short of the mark, this is easily the most advanced stealth-based adventure title to date. With many gamers finding *Metal Gear Solid 2* a bit of a let down, and no other big Japanese companies even trying to create something on a similar scale, it's great to see a Western developer taking on the challenge. Even though it isn't quite perfect, *Splinter Cell* is still a stunning title that deserves to be praised. Nice one, Ubi Soft.



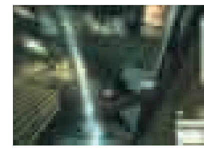
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM...

00:30 MINUTES



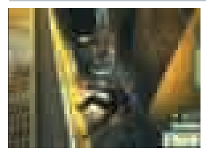
They say time flies when you're having fun and that's certainly true where *Splinter Cell* is concerned. But after half an hour you'll, probably still be on the training missions.

02:00 HOURS



You should be well into your first real mission after a couple of hours. Exploring the police station reveals a few surprises in the storyline. You have been warned.

07:23 HOURS



Two day's worth of fairly solid play will see you through to the rooftops of the Chinese Embassy. This mission is about remaining hidden in the shadows and not using your gun at all.

PC £29.99 OUT 31/01/03

Seeing as the Xbox is basically a PC dressed up as a console, there's little difference between the two versions. Of course, you'll need a powerful PC to run it as well as the Xbox.

VERDICT 8/10

NEARLY GAME OF THE YEAR BUT IT LACKS A LITTLE POLISH

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£1 Per Play

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

TEKKEN 4

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

SOUL CALIBUR

DESPITE NAMCO'S RECENT LACKLUSTRE TITLES, THE JAPANESE GIANT PULLS ONE OUT OF THE BAG FOR THIS SEQUEL

SOUL CALIBUR 2

One-on-one beat-'em-ups have found themselves in a bit of a rut recently. There was a time when *Tekken* was all about combos, *Virtua Fighter* was all about realism and *Dead Or Alive* was all about multi-level arenas. But, as each series has evolved, these elements have gradually been filtered across and for the last year there's been nothing much to differentiate between the leading brands. Now that Namco has finally launched its latest effort, the highly anticipated *Soul Calibur 2*, into arcades worldwide, we can finally expect to see something new… can't we?

Well, sort of. Unsurprisingly, *Soul Calibur 2* doesn't inject new life into the genre like we hoped it would, but it's certainly not going to disappoint fans of the prequel, or *Soul Blade* on PSone for that matter. It's clear from the moment you drop your first coin into the cabinet that this is essentially the Dreamcast game engine, slightly re-programmed to be compatible with the System 246 arcade board (basically a PS2 in an arcade cabinet). It's also clear that the hardware isn't hugely more powerful than the Dreamcast. Sure, the fighters benefit from a few additional polygons and some of the backgrounds are a little more expansive, but it isn't really doing anything that couldn't have been realized to a similar standard on SEGA's underrated console. In fact, some visual aspects are actually a little worse this time round – for example, the textures have lost a little clarity (although the additional polygons do help to disguise this to some extent).

Aside from the purely visual aspect, the extra polygon pushing power of System 246 has given the programmers the opportunity to make a few gameplay-enhancing changes – the most obvious being the inclusion of interactive backgrounds. While these are nowhere near as as those in *Power Stone*, for example, they do allow a little more variety in the battles. Fighters can be bounced off the walls to increase the number of hits performed in a single combo, or slammed against them violently with a single blow. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen as often as we'd like – mainly because the arenas are fairly large and fights tend to cover only a small amount of ground before one opponent is knocked out. Similarly, fighters can be

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
INTERACTIVE ARENAS: *Soul Calibur* finally has 3D walls around the arenas.
BETTER AI: It's much more difficult to button bash your way through the game this time.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY FIGHTERS?
Sixteen in total, 13 of which are available from the outset.

Q. ORIGINAL CHARACTERS?
The only completely new character is Raphael, who fights with a traditional fencing style. All the other new names are simply rehashed versions of characters from the prequel.

Q. GOOD SOUND?
As far as the music goes, this is more along the lines of *Soul Blade* than *Soul Calibur*. The voice acting is decent but there are some bad continuity errors in the scripting.

If you ignore the brutality of the fight, this shot looks almost festive. Expect to see that sparkly swoosh on a BBC ident near you soon.



When fighting a man who's wearing chain mail and armour, a tin opener can often be just as effective as a lightning bolt.







HOME EXTRAS IN THE ARCADE

The big surprises in arcade *Soul Calibur 2* are the four new gameplay modes – particularly Conquest. In this, you'll be able to to build up your own character with RPG-esque attributes. Depending on the tactics you use you're awarded Soul, Power, Skill and Wisdom points that decide your overall status. The hardware then saves your name and status to its on-board memory so other players can fight against your character. You're also given a password after each game so you can train your character on any *Soul Calibur* machine.

thrown off edges for a quick victory, though this only happens when a particularly aggressive attack is used – just like in the first two games.

The rest of the action is, for the most part, identical to the previous *Soul Calibur*, although certain moves and combos have been balanced out a bit. Some of Maxi's easier nunchaku combos have been slowed down slightly and require more precise timing to be executed, while side-stepping (which is simply a case of pressing up or down, as before) has also been tweaked and is a much more important factor in winning battles. The CPU certainly knows how to use it too – we were foiled in quite a few of our attempts to win by using simple button-bashing tactics. In fact, the AI has come on quite a long way since the prequel; not so much that you could be fooled into thinking you're competing against a human opponent, but enough to deter you from resorting to the same combos time after time. The difficulty level was one of the few criticisms levelled at the first *Soul Calibur* and, while the sequel isn't exactly difficult, fights do tend to be closer and more varied.

But while none of the new features and upgrades are particularly fresh or innovative, *Soul Calibur 2* is still pretty much the pinnacle of 3D beat-'em-ups. With no signs of a follow-up to *Power Stone 2* and seemingly no other companies willing to stick their neck out and try something equally as bold, there's really only a choice of this, *Tekken* or *Virtua Fighter* to keep arcade beat-'em-up players happy. In all honesty, there isn't a lot of difference between the three titles as far as overall production quality goes, but when it comes to style we'd pick *Soul Calibur 2* every time. Fighting with swords, staffs and nunchakus is simply more rewarding than fisticuffs, and also offers far more exciting combos. With a comprehensive line-up of characters and an atmosphere that blends the grace of *Soul Calibur* with the texture of *Soul Blade*, *Soul Calibur 2* encompasses everything that made the first two games appealing. Now we'll just have to wait and see whether GameCube, PS2, or Xbox gets the best home conversion next year.



Look at those polygons. And you have to applaud the use of raver's glo-sticks as a weapon – hands in the air…



Never underestimate the power of a woman with a bin lid and a pair of pixie boots. She could have you any day.



"No! Not the scaffolding, you tool. You'll kill us both!" Sure, he's brawny but he's lacking the old grey matter…

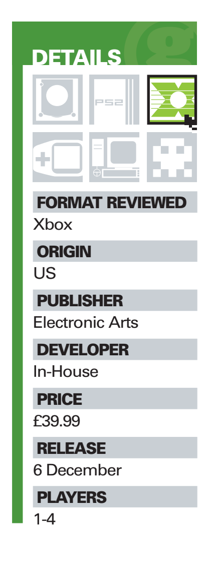


VERDICT 8/10

UNORIGINAL, BUT STILL THE PINNACLE OF THE GENRE

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE

IS EA'S WARTIME SHOOTER STILL BATTLE-READY AFTER SIX MONTHS LEAVE?

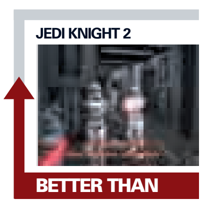


Electronic Arts seems to be obsessed with making all its games available on every format. Even when it means porting across old games to more powerful consoles, every effort is made to ensure that no major updates are made to the existing games. The latest in line of such titles from the repeat offenders is a port of one of the PS2's best shooters, but can it still cut the mustard six months down the line? The first obvious oversight is the graphics, where little to no improvement has been made. As a result, *Medal Of Honor* is humbled in this department by much of the Xbox catalogue. We've begun to see what the Xbox is really capable of – it's disappointing to have so many games being directly ported without acknowledging this extra power.

The body of the game remains exactly the same – the story documents the exploits of Lt. Jimmy Patterson during the Second World War. Spread over nineteen varied missions, the action tends to be fairly linear; the actual gameplay is still okay but it does seem rather limited now. The beach landing was outstanding for the PS2, but it lacks the scale and exuberance of the same scene in *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* on the PC (something the Xbox should be able to recreate effortlessly). One surprising inclusion is a multiplayer mode: absent in the PS2 version, it finally appears to add some longevity to the proceedings. While reasonably well done, this is not something that will keep you away from *TimeSplitters 2* for too long. Ratings and cheats add some life to the single player game but it's still a little short for our liking and once you've finished it, you're unlikely to return to the front line.

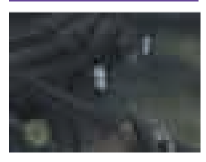
On its original release back in June, *Medal Of Honor* was a fairly strong title without any notable competition – the story today is a little different. Xbox owners have been enjoying *Halo* from day one and since the advent of *TimeSplitters 2*, the bar has been raised significantly. Even the PS2 version is beginning to look and feel dated so it comes as no surprise that *Frontline* is even more underwhelming on the more powerful machine. *Medal Of Honor* for Xbox was a wonderful prospect but the finished result is extremely disappointing. With such strong competition, we can't really recommend this.



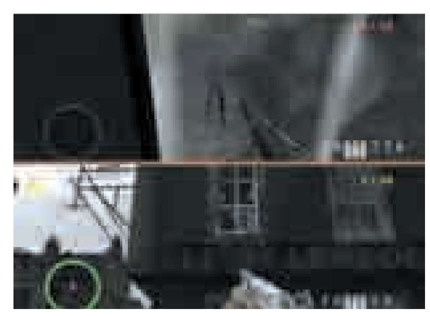




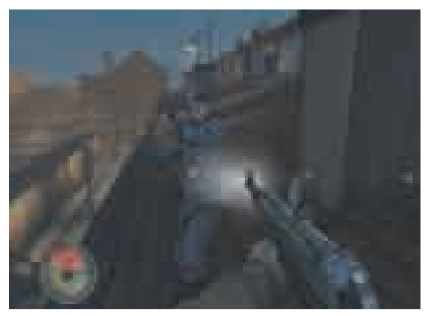




There's not much to call between these two versions... since both are just ports of the old PS2 title, everything is more or less identical. For the purist, the Xbox's marginally superior sound and textures should just tip the balance.



Split screen action in full flow. It's nice to see EA actually adding something new to a port for once…



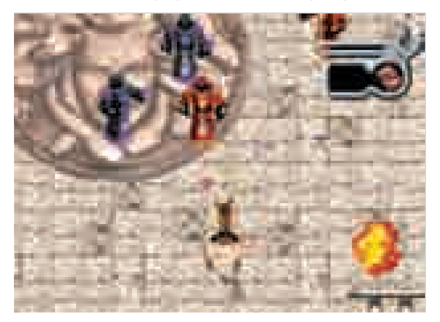
Those Nazis get everywhere… If nothing else, the variety of the locations is quite pleasing.



It's easy to see where comparisons with *Saving Private Ryan* came from. Regrettably, there doesn't seem to be a Tom Hanks character anywhere who you can rough up a bit (to serve him right for *Forrest Gump*, you see…)



It might be a bit cold, but snowy wastes are the best places to look for lost treasure. Thankfully, it gets a bit warmer as the game goes on…



Not surprisingly, these hooded blokes seem to be the source of all evil – so they probably deserve all the hot lead you can throw at them.



Ahh, wild packs of wolves – the mainstay of the *Tomb Raider* games. Why they ever took the series out of the tombs, we'll never know…

LARA'S BACK, BUT SHE'S HAD A BIT OF A REDUCTION IN PLACES…

TOMB RAIDER: THE PROPHECY

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Ubi Soft

DEVELOPER
Core Design

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Although it seems like she's been on hiatus for two years now, Lara Croft isn't what you'd call an idle girl. When not busy raiding tombs on the PlayStation, she's actually been making quite a living on the Game Boy Color as well. With two games under her belt for the now-defunct handheld though, you'd think it was about time she 'got with the times, man' and came up with something a bit more advanced… at least in a Game Boy sense, that is.

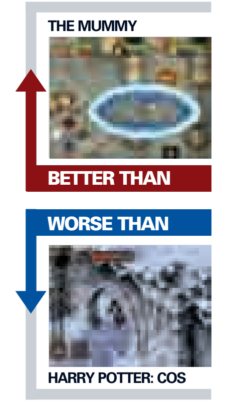
Thankfully, Core Design hasn't ignored the existence of Nintendo's premier handheld, which is why we can welcome *Tomb Raider: The Prophecy* into the family. The biggest change is noticeable instantly; in contrast to the first two Game Boy titles, *Tomb Raider: The Prophecy* takes things into the third dimension thanks to the new overhead viewpoint. This new direction helps to give the levels a greater feeling of size… not that they need any help. Considering that many of the stages feature six or more sections (with each area being huge in itself), there's enough to deal with here without things being made to look even bigger than they already are.

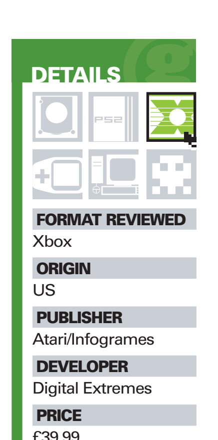
However, it's not just the vastness of the game that impresses – Core clearly hasn't held back when it comes to the restrictive visuals on the GBA. Detail is the order of the day here, with each location (be they tombs, temples or, er, more tombs) looking mighty fine. What's more, Lara animates beautifully and jumps, runs and shoots almost as well as her PSone self. Even her ponytail bobs about realistically – and we seem to remember when Core boasted about that, as if it was a big achievement on the console. Pah.

Of course, there's a slight problem – once you've played through a few stages of the game, you might as well have played them all. Apart from the odd glimmer of originality, virtually all of the gameplay involves shooting things while backing away, pushing buttons and jumping gaps… yawn. Looking back at the PSone *Tomb Raider* games though, we recall that this is the problem the series has always had: aside from the original (which had some truly innovative puzzles), *Tomb Raider* has always been nothing but 'push this, kill that, jump the other'. Should the GBA game be criticised for lack of innovation? Certainly. Except for the fact that it's still damn playable and fun. Don't you just hate it when that happens?



ENJOYABLE, BUT A LITTLE MONOTONOUS IN PLACES





FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Atari/Infogrames

DEVELOPER
Digital Extremes

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16 (via system link/Xbox Live)

007: NIGHTFIRE



BETTER THAN

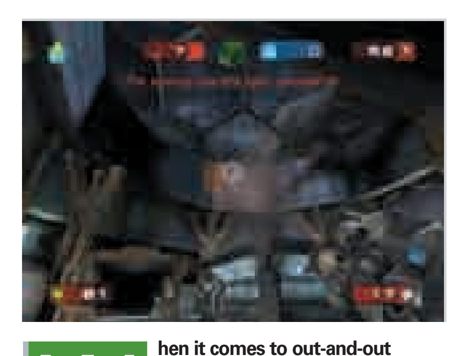
WORSE THAN



TIMESPLITTERS 2

HAD IT WITH HALO? TIRED OF TIMESPLITTERS 2? THIS COULD BE JUST WHAT YOU NEED…

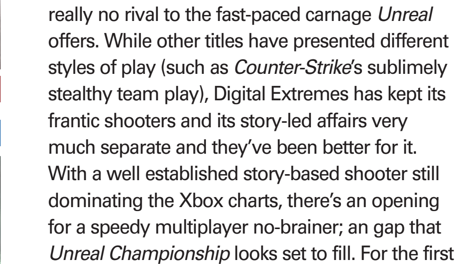
UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP







Bombing Run is a great addition to the game modes. It's basically American Football with big guns.



When it comes to out-and-out shooting on the PC, *Unreal Tournament* still reigns supreme. Admittedly, the recent *UT2003* just pips its predecessor by being bigger, louder and faster than before, but as a series there is really no rival to the fast-paced carnage *Unreal* offers. While other titles have presented different styles of play (such as *Counter-Strike*'s sublimely stealthy team play), Digital Extremes has kept its frantic shooters and its story-led affairs very much separate and they've been better for it. With a well established story-based shooter still dominating the Xbox charts, there's an opening for a speedy multiplayer no-brainer; an gap that *Unreal Championship* looks set to fill. For the first time, the fact that the event is supposed to be a futuristic sport is now being played up; from the WWE-style intro to the team selection and special abilities, there's a whole lot more to it than just running around guns blazing. That said, the basic style of the gameplay will be very familiar to those who have played *Unreal Tournament*. Save for a few improvements, there has been little change to the already great formula – if it ain't broke, don't fix it…

One of the few gameplay tweaks is the Adrenaline system: killing opponents and collecting capsules raises your Adrenaline level and when it peaks you'll have access to a number of special abilities. These range from Invisibility to Regeneration and are easily activated by a quick series of directional presses on the left control stick. A lot of the better features from previous *Unreal* titles also return; the double-tap dodging



While it starts off fairly tame, the T.A.G. blast soon envelops a huge blast radius.



Some of the settings are visually stunning – the Northern Lights are an aesthetic highlight.



BRING OUT THE BIG GUNS

The *Unreal* arsenal has been given a shake-up for its first visit to the Xbox. The starting pistol has been replaced with an Assault Rifle (complete with handy auxiliary grenade launcher) while the Sniper Rifle is now the equally deadly Lightning Gun. Best of all is the T.A.G. Rifle – at a glance, it appears to be nothing more than a chunky laser pointer but once you figure out how to use it, you can trigger a huge laser blast from an orbiting satellite. This is a great way of killing everyone within a hundred metres, which is why this gem of a weapon is so hard to come by.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY WEAPONS?
You'll get to use ten weapons of mass destruction. Sadly, there's no Redeemer this time.

Q. WHAT GAME MODES ARE THERE?
Only six modes of play exist, but each is beautifully conceived and executed.

Q. INDIVIDUAL PLAYER STATS?
Oh yes. Each character plays slightly differently and has their own starting weapon.

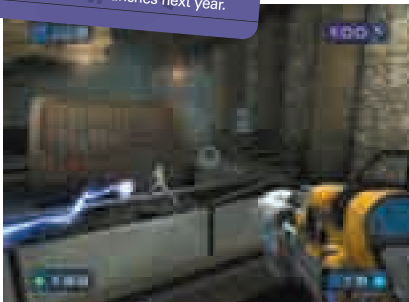


(quickly press any direction twice for an evasive leap) works excellently with the controller and there's even the ability to perform double-jumps too. This adds to the hidden areas you can reach – combine the double-jump with the Agility power-up and the Rocket Jump and you'll be able to soar across entire levels. Thankfully, the weapons this time around are similar enough to maintain the excellent balance but different enough to remind us that this is a brand new game. Many old favourites like the Flak Cannon and Shock Rifle return, while some of the more generic weapons (like the Sniper Rifle and Rocket Launcher) have been updated or replaced accordingly. Thanks to this, the weapon set feels a lot more diverse than in many other shooters; there's only so many times we can be impressed by the same pistols and rifles so it's nice to see some thought going into the firepower.

Graphically, *Unreal Championship* is looking as superb as the series ever has; flinging around explosions and lighting like only an Xbox can, the huge levels are as high a standard as any maps we've seen in a deathmatch shooter. The other game modes such as Capture The Flag and Double Domination all feature their own maps designed to complement the mode, but by far the best of these new modes is Bombing Run. Falling somewhere between Capture The Flag and American Football, teams must work together to get the ball to the goal inside the enemy base. Tackles are very explosive and the carrier is able to fire the ball from their gun in order to set up passes or score from long distances. Imaginative, co-operative and, most importantly, great fun.

Perhaps the best news is that *Unreal Championship* will support Microsoft's online venture, Xbox Live, when it launches next year – 16-player games over a broadband connection will be as commonplace as they are on *Unreal*'s PC brethren. Until then, there's four-player split screen and system link play to keep you amused – if nothing else, this will serve as a great way to learn levels and modes before blowing the hell out of players from all around the world. So long as you're not looking for an in-depth single player mode (although *Championship* does boast the deepest one-player experience in a predominantly multiplayer FPS to date), *Unreal Championship* is a blast of epic proportions. The many difficulty settings cater for gamers of all abilities and while there aren't so many game modes on offer in this title, there's still something to entertain everybody.

When it comes down to it, *Unreal Championship* is the finest deathmatch-oriented shooter ever to grace a console. Its battles offer a totally different experience to thep competition on the Xbox; less crazy and light-hearted than *Timesplitters 2* but faster-paced and more balanced than *Halo*'s multiplayer modes. The only negative points we noticed were some annoying kill taunts (which can thankfully be turned off) and a little slowdown on some of the larger levels. These are minor gripes, however, and not enough to detract from the experience. In fact, any other shooter will be hard pressed to land a head shot on *Unreal Championship* any time soon. What's that you say? Story mode? Pah, with action as good as this, who needs a story?



A fiver says she isn't going to dodge that lightning bolt…



The Lightning Gun is basically just a more shocking version of the Sniper Rifle, but it's certainly no less effective.

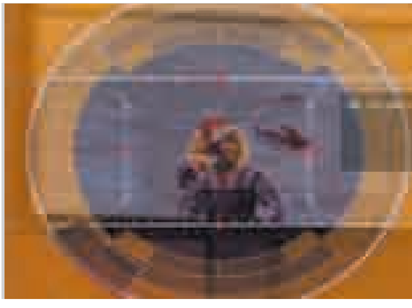
PC | **£29.99** | **2003**

The PC version will have downloadable mods and maps galore. Apart from that, weapons, power-ups and many of the arenas are the same in the PC and Xbox games.

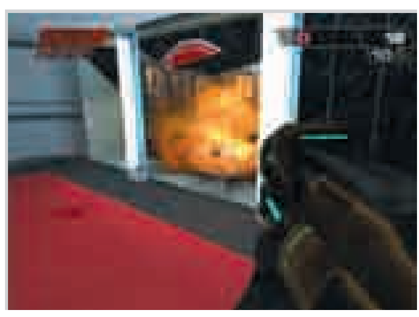
VERDICT 8/10
THE UNREAL FORMULA IS TWEAKED TO NEAR PERFECTION




You may get it far too early but the WASP Launcher is no less fun to use.



Headshots and high explosives are the keys to success.



From the very start, you're encouraged to blast your way into new areas.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Volition

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4



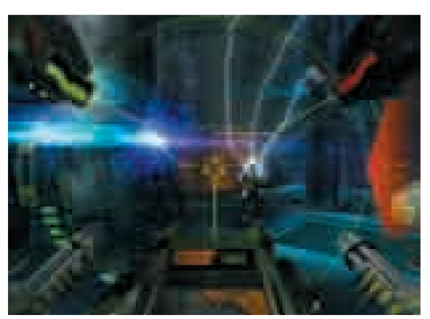
FORGET PEACEFUL PROTESTS – IT'S TIME TO BREAK OUT THE ROCKETS

RED FACTION 2

As a rule, first-person shoot-'em-ups through the years have always tried to outdo one another in terms of their armouries. Back in their day, the huge rocket launchers of *Doom* and *Quake* were highly impressive, but now they seem like cheap fireworks that leave sooty marks where they 'explode'. Over time, weapons like *Turok*'s Nuke or *Unreal*'s Multi-Launcher have fed our hunger for lavish pyrotechnics in games… but still we wanted more. When the original *Red Faction* came along, we were promised big guns, huge explosions and deformable landscapes and, for the most part, we got just that. Despite the impressive weaponry on show though, the Geo-Mod technology was under-used and not without its flaws. Now, a year and a half later, the eagerly anticipated sequel steps up to the plate. Can it improve on its predecessor's shortcomings? Strangely, the answer is both yes and no.

First off, the Geo-Mod has been improved. The destructive fun has been given a makeover and is now better coded and better implemented. Unfortunately, the annoyance of not really knowing what can and can't be destroyed still remains, but to a lesser extent than before. There are now more stages where you use rockets or grenades to tear new paths around obstacles. Obviously, letting the player destroy everything in sight would be impractical – a stray rocket could make finishing levels or completing objectives impossible. This in

Unfortunately, you only get to use the gun turrets – controllable vehicles are few and far between.



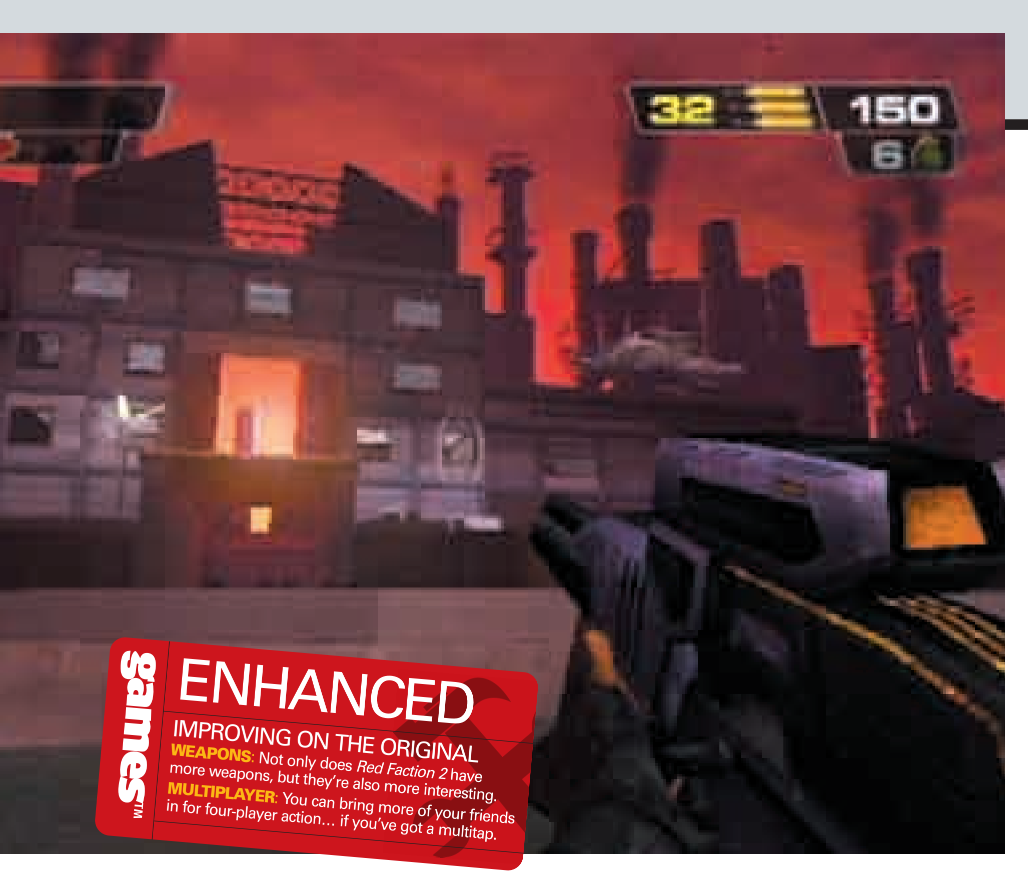
Crashing around in the Battle Armor with all four guns blazing is one of the highlights of the game.

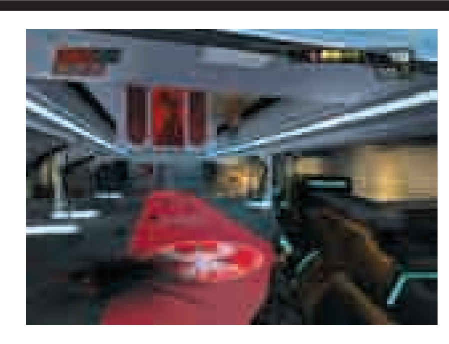
FAQs

Q. HOW MANY LEVELS?
Forty four stages, spread over 11 different 'chapters' of the story.

Q. BEST WEAPON?
Easily the WASP Rocket Launcher – it's ridiculously powerful, obliterating people and walls without even breaking a sweat. Nice.

Q. ANY UNLOCKABLE SECRETS?
New characters and levels for the multiplayer mode open up as you play through the main game.





GEO-MOD EVOLVES

The much-hyped Geo-Mod engine was the standout feature of the first *Red Faction*, despite not being as well implemented as it could have been. While still far from perfect in the sequel, the game engine has been improved dramatically and is a brave step in the right direction, challenging other titles to do better. To be fair, a fully deformable 3D world would be tough even for a high-end PC; to expect this kind of realism from the PS2 is asking too much, but *Red Faction 2*'s mechanics are a very respectable effort nonetheless.

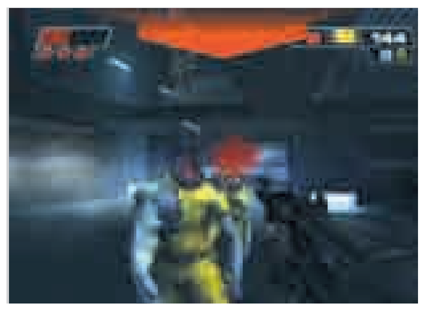
mind, the Geo-Mod engine is not far from what it should be in the context of a videogame and, as such, should be applauded.

The multiplayer side of things has also been made a lot better – since the release of *TimeSplitters 2* on the major formats, the multi-player FPS goalposts have been moved. While *Red Faction 2* lacks the overall prowess of Free Radical's multiplayer masterpiece, it's a sufficiently different experience that entices players into blowing up walls rather than shooting at mon-keys. To keep it all running smoothly, weapon pick-ups are represented by simple tokens rather than 3D models; this detracts from the realism factor instilled by the Geo-Mod technology but isn't a major issue.

The armoury is just as impressive as ever but this is both one of the game's best and worst features. The huge guns are a joy to behold and to wield, and picking off enemies through walls with the Rail Driver never gets dull. Unfortunately, since you often need explosives of some kind to progress, a lot of the really impressive heavy duty weapons are available in the early stages of the game – even the super-powerful WASP launcher is yours within an hour of gameplay. As a result, *Red Faction 2* instantly loses the suspense and build-up of similar titles; how can you look for-ward to finding a super-weapon deep into the game when most of your arsenal is collected in the first half?

One of the main problems though is that there's just not enough to do. The single player mode consists of 11 areas, each divded into between two and six sections. These smaller stages are inconsistent in size and while some are fairly substantial, others can be finished in a minute or so. It's comparable in length to *TimeSplitters 2*'s Story mode but, without all the extra modes, replay value is sadly shortened. Sure, there are things to unlock but these take the form of items in the game's art gallery – all the extra multiplayer features are unlocked during your first play-through. The vehicle sections that were so special in the first game have been cut down too; apart from the Battle Armor mech and the Sub, the rest of the vehicle rides are just that – rides. You'll be armed to the teeth in the gunner's seat but you can't help feeling that you should be doing more than just holding down the Shoot buttons for a prolonged period.

Add to this the fact that some enemies will take full clips to the chest or head without going down and you'll see that the realism provided by the Geo-Mod engine is watered down by the rest of the game; some of the bosses are apparently normal people who can withstand dozens of earth-shattering missiles. Explosives are the only feasible solution to this on higher difficulty settings and this is a shame; great weapons like the Precision Rifle and Rail Driver are lost in the sea of big explosions. This game may look and sound the part but, ultimately, it can't quite walk the walk. In essence, *Red Faction 2* is a glorified pyrotechnic display that, despite a few outstanding explosive moments, is another 'fun while it lasts' title that doesn't actually last very long at all.





Now even walls won't come between you and your target…

VERDICT 5/10

FAST AND FRANTIC FUN, BUT FAR TOO SHORT-LIVED

On-screen icons indicate what to do in certain situations – a spinning A-button means talking, while this C-stick symbol means you need an item.

STARFOX

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

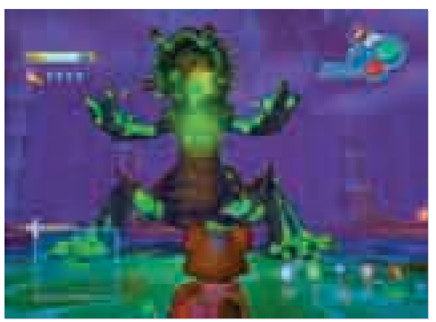
PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Rare

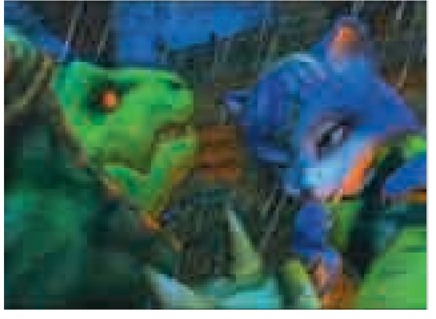
PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

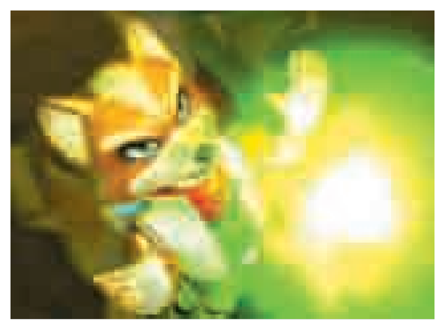
PLAYERS
1



Some of the bosses are impressive and huge – but there just aren't enough of them to go round.



He's green and scaly, with a ton of sharp teeth and an incredibly gruff voice… so he'll be a bad guy, eh? Yep, say hello to General Scales.



Every time you collect something new, you'll see this unskippable cutscene – funnily enough, it gets a bit annoying after a while.



Softly, softly, catchy StarFox – many of the Krazoa shrines feature puzzles that require a fair amount of patience and dexterity.

The whole game revolves around finding the planet's lost Krazoa Spirits. But they're not as friendly as you might think at first.

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
The average gamer will get through it in about 15 hours on the first attempt.

Q. ANY SECRET SIDE-QUESTS?
None whatsoever… which is why it's all a bit disappointing, to be honest.

Q. RARE – WHAT NEXT?
Currently, Rare is planning to release *Kameo: Elements of Power* on the Xbox in Spring '03.

gamesTM

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

LOAD-FREE: *StarFox* loads areas on the fly, which means there's absolutely no loading time at all.

FLUFFY: Rare has come up with some amazing textures… that Fox, he sure is a furry critter.

Considering *StarFox Adventures* has already seen so many problems, including a complete change of console, during its relatively short lifespan, it's probably a good job that Rare is heading for greener pastures. Practically everyone with a GameCube has been anticipating this game since it was confirmed, but the mixed opinions that greeted its launch in Japan and America (ranging from "Rare's best game yet" to "a shallow and linear collect-'em-up with little challenge") haven't really done much to bolster waning hopes. Make no mistake though, this is the last Rare game you'll see on a primary Nintendo console and, as such, ought to be a little bit special, if only because most people feel Rare owe it to them. So, is it? Well, yes. And no.

On the plus side, *StarFox Adventures* is a real visual feast and pushes the GameCube hard, especially in a Nintendo-branded game. What's more, *StarFox Adventures* leans a little too heavily on its *Banjo* and *Donkey Kong 64* roots at times and turns from an enjoyable adventure romp into a challenge to see how many items you can collect at once. If it's not Spellstones, it's Krazoa Spirits; if it's not Krazoa Spirits, it's Staff Powers; and if it's not Staff Powers, it's Fuel Cells, Scarabs, Bomb Spores, Energy Gems, Moon Seeds and much, much more. It's not quite the 'collecting for the sake of it' that was seen in *Donkey Kong 64*, but all the same it can get tiresome.

The decidedly Western style of *StarFox Adventures* means that it lacks the charm and subtlety of Japanese-developed adventures like *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time* (a comparison that is made all too easily). In *Zelda: OOT*, players were gently nudged from dungeon to dungeon by means of a smoothly-crafted story and occasional

ADVENTURES

RARE'S LAST GAMECUBE OUTING IS QUITE GOOD, BUT…

for which Rare deserves to be congratulated. The game looks great anyway, but it's the detail that makes the whole thing really shine: blades of grass ripple in the breeze as you run through them, smoke and fire move totally convincingly and as for the fur texturing on the more fluffy characters… well, it's just plain lovely. Although the graphics are a clear step ahead of the pack, the structure remains similar to more than a few games we've seen in the past. The combat system is a cut-down version of the Z-targeting method used in *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*, while some of the puzzles involving the staff appear to be taken straight from the Breegull Blaster sections of *Banjo-Tooie*. The Arwing stages (used to transport Fox between different areas of the planet) are true to the *StarFox* franchise, but they feel tacked on rather than playing an intrinsic part of the game. It's a pity really because, Arwing sections aside, the inclusion of the *StarFox* concept into the game generally works really well.

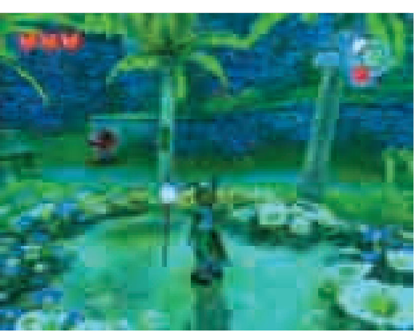
By attempting to merge elements of games like *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Zelda*, Rare has tried to come up with a brave (if rather Westernised) adventure of epic proportions. Sadly though, the first two hours of the game are less of a challenge and more of a tutorial. You're basically led by the hand through a sequence of blindingly obvious puzzles and heavy-handed 'here's how to do this' sections, which isn't how it should be done, hints from Navi the Fairy, but you always felt you had control and complete freedom about what to do next. By contrast, *StarFox Adventures* offers none of this flexibility: the game simply kicks you headlong from one area to another by means of characters telling you at the end of each stage: "Now you *will* go here… no, really, you will". Obviously, you can go exploring but it's largely pointless as there isn't anything to find – the path leads rigidly in one direction and one direction only. This leaves the game feeling rather stifled and the overly linear structure is just a bit patronising – it's almost as if the game's been dumbed down on purpose.

Out of all our complaints though, the thing that annoys us most is that we found it impossible not to enjoy *StarFox Adventures*. The truth of the matter is that the longer you play it, the further into the story you get drawn and the more you want to see – a mark of any good adventure game. It might not be the greatest Rare title ever (thanks to its bizarre combination of overly obvious and frustratingly unfair puzzles) but, in the end, *StarFox Adventures* is certainly a respectable ending to what has been a beautiful friendship.

VERDICT 7/10

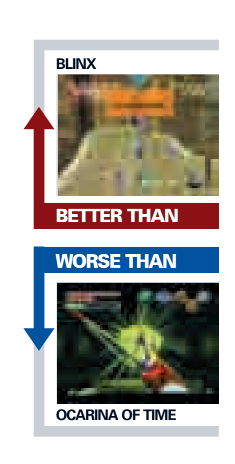
INCREDIBLY LINEAR, BUT WORTH FINISHING ONCE





CAN'T GET THE STAFF

Fox's main weapon is the magical staff that he finds soon after landing on Dinosaur Planet (although the staff actually belongs to Krystal, the blue-furred girl that you control during the opening segment of the game). Even though the staff's most obvious use is for bashing enemies on the head, there are plenty more things to do with it. For instance, you can prise up rocks to find Scarabs or use it as a lever to activate switches. Once you start collecting Staff Powers though, even more opportunities open up and you can start shooting fireballs, causing earthquakes or even flying up to higher ledges with it.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
EA Games

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

AGENT UNDER FIRE



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

EA DELIVER A BOND GAME THAT'S GOT A LICENCE TO THRILL. WELL, ALMOST…

JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE

***GoldenEye* aside, Bond games have never been amazing. Varying from the not bad (like *The World Is Not Enough* on the N64 or *Agent Under Fire*) to the downright abysmal (namely *007 Racing*), they've always languished in the depths of mediocrity.** At least, they did until now. Despite the fact that it's taken EA five different attempts at the license to do it, the mighty publisher has finally managed to combine all the elements necessary to make a good Bond game. Although why they couldn't do it before now is anybody's guess…

Right from the off, *Nightfire* does a good job of capturing that special Bond-esque flavour that makes every 007 film worth watching – even if they are all virtually identical. Evil maniac intent on taking over the world (and obligatory right-hand man)? Check. Scores of nameless henchmen whose only goal is to wipe you out? Check. A bevy of ladies with sizable cleavage, out to either help or hinder your progress? Check and double check – hey, you wouldn't expect anything else from a Bond game. It's even got its own theme tune and opening credit sequence, complete with half-naked ladies rolling around with guns – when it comes down to it, you can't get much more Bond than that.

Although these things are all superfluous to the actual gameplay, there are plenty of Bond elements that play a much more important role. Obviously, 007 sports a wide range of gadgets and gizmos that can be used at just the right time such as mobile phone grappling hooks, electric shaver shock grenades and key ring stun guns. On top of all his technological gadgetry though, Mr Bond has a number of physical tricks up his sleeve too. At certain points in the game, icons may appear in the corner of the screen to indicate that Bond can do something – be it clambering across a wire, shimmying along a ledge or something equally daring. Start using that skill and the game immediately switches to a third-person perspective so you can see how far there is to go – a neat touch. However, skills like wire-climbing require strength which is displayed as an ever-depleting bar – if it empties, you're liable to fall to a bone-crunching death. Ouch.

FAQs

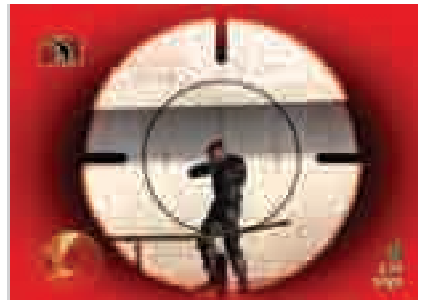
Q. REPLAY VALUE?
Each of the 11 stages changes depending on the difficulty level, but there are also those elusive Platinum medals for expert spies to collect.

Q. ANY GOOD WEAPONS?
Definitely – the guided missile launcher makes a welcome return in the opening level, while Bond's car has some excellent surprises hidden up its shiny metallic sleeves.

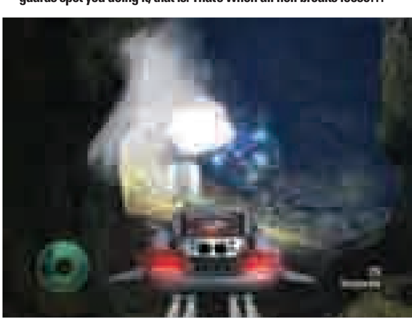
Q. IS PIERCE IN IT?
Sort of. Good old Mr Brosnan was happy to lend his face to EA for use in *Nightfire*, but not his voice, which means he sounds nothing like himself. Shame, really.



Dashing through the snow has never been so much fun. And the lack of a one-horse open sleigh doesn't matter in the slightest.



Sniping enemies is ideal for keeping a low profile – unless the other guards spot you doing it, that is. That's when all hell breaks loose…



Sneaking into an evil genius's underwater hideout is easy when your car turns into a submarine. Luckily, Bond's does. What a coincidence.

ENHANCED

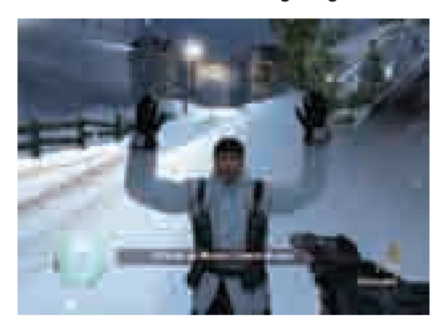
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

SKILLS: Bond has different skills depending on his situation, such as sliding down handy cables.

PRETTY FACE: The characters look even more realistic, which makes the game more believable.

FRIENDLY FIRE

***Nightfire* features a full-on multiplayer mode on top of the single-player action. Plus there are loads more game modes to experience from your bog-standard Deathmatch and Capture The Flag to new ones such as Uplink, Demolition and Industrial Espionage. There are plenty of different characters and levels to play with too. Of course, not all the stages, modes and characters are available from the off. If you want the full complement you not only have to play the single-player game, but also earn those hard-to-reach medals. Talk about making things difficult…**

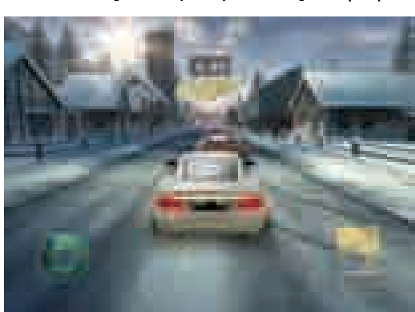




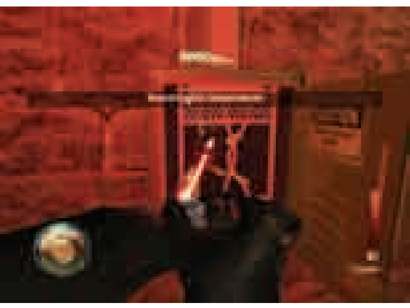
Ahh, heatseeking missiles – just the job for clearing out helipads packed with machine gun-toting bad guys. Just don't get too close to the flames, eh?

If there's one thing that makes *Nightfire* so appealing as a Bond game, it's the variety of gameplay offered. Each different level manages to offer something new, rather than the same old 'kill anything that moves' malarky that a lot of FPS games display today. One minute you'll be breaking into a castle under cover of night, the next you'll be racing through the streets in your Aston Martin Vanquish – then it's on to sniping your way through a disused nuclear power plant, avoiding innocent guards as you infiltrate a skyscraper, speeding through the snow on the back of a heavily-armed skidoo and (not surprisingly) cutting down hordes of evil henchmen. It's a good mix and one that manages to keep things interesting as you try to guess exactly what might be coming next.

Unfortunately though, while *Nightfire* manages to impress with its wide range of playing styles and high-octane action, it also stumbles on some rather basic gameplay mechanics. For starters, the game's difficulty is less of a curve and more a vertical ascent – enemies go from 'couldn't hit the side of a barn' to 'crack shot at a hundred paces' depending on which difficulty setting you use, which makes playing on the tougher settings less appealing. Combine this with the fact that many of the enemies can take three or four bullets to the chest without going down (even on the easiest setting) and it can all get a bit tough at times. We can't also help feeling that while the driving sections seem a lot tighter and refined, the lack of freedom that the single-route 'A-to-B' levels offer isn't quite as enjoyable as the last game. Finding the quickest route via the map and getting there flawlessly without getting lost was part of the fun before – taking that away just leaves the free-driving section feeling rather limited.



Rather than being free-roaming, the car sections in *Nightfire* now follow a set route – they're fun, but a bit on the limited side.



Cut the green wire and everything's hunky-dory – cut the red one however and you'll be needing your machine gun pretty sharpish…

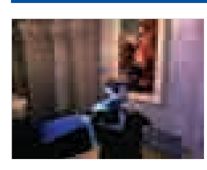
Despite all these annoying faults though, *Nightfire* still manages to be great fun – mainly because of the familiar Bond atmosphere. In the same way that the Bond films managed to use the same old concept and still make it even more enjoyable than it was last time, *Nightfire* improves on a tried-and-trusted formula while throwing in some impressive bells and whistles for good measure. Sure, it makes a few mistakes along the way and it's certainly not the greatest FPS game around at the moment, but *Nightfire* is easily the best non-*GoldenEye* Bond outing since *TWINE* on the N64. Well worth a look, even if you're not a huge Bond fan.



VERDICT 6/10

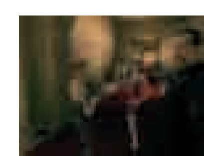
A DECENT BOND GAME, BUT NOT THE BEST FPS AROUND

PS2	£39.99	OUT NOW



While the PS2 version is obviously the lead game for EA, it's also the least accomplished – the graphics are rather fuzzy and four-player multiplayer requires a multitap.

GAMECUBE	£39.99	OUT NOW

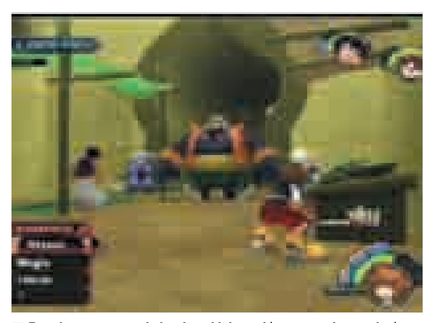


Unsurprisingly, EA brings a perfect port of the PS2 version to the GameCube. But as the GC could have handled the Xbox version with minimal difficulty, we have to ask 'why?'

PC	£29.99	OUT NOW



A markedly different game – level design is less arcadey and Bond's new third-person skills are used much more than in the console versions. Very good, but nothing amazing.



Enemies get more varied and world-themed (not to mention tougher) as the game progresses.



The real-time fighting can get quite hectic and confusing at times.



The wandering Moogles in Traverse Town will bring a smile to the face of any Squaresoft fan.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEE

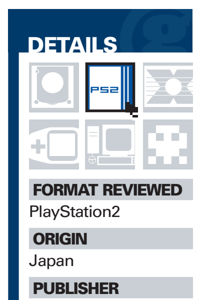
DEVELOPER
Squaresoft/Disney Interactive

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

DARK CLOUD



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SKIES OF ARCADIA

FINAL FANTASY MEETS DISNEY? IT'S BETTER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK…

KINGDOM HEARTS

Take one of the most prolific forces in RPG gaming, drop in some eye-popping locations from timeless animated classics and add an ample serving of the world's most popular characters. Now mix in story elements from fairy tales, old favourites and a few new plotlines and simmer gently. If prepared correctly, the result of this recipe for success will most likely be Disney and Squaresoft's new role-player, *Kingdom Hearts*. With these two superpowers as the driving force behind the game, it's got to be something pretty special… right?

Plotwise, *Kingdom Hearts* is exactly what you'd expect it to be, documenting the tale of a young boy named Sora and his friends. While planning to visit distant countries, their home is invaded by a dark force known as the Heartless and the group is separated. Waking in a strange land, Sora's epic quest begins – a journey that spans many worlds and encompasses hundreds of familiar faces. The first thing you'll notice is just how faithfully everything from the Disney world has been recreated here – from your initial encounter with soon-to-be comrades Donald and Goofy to exploring Aladdin's Arabian abode, everything is exactly as it should be. The love and care that has gone into getting the look and feel of the Disney aspect of the game just right has paid dividends; you really do feel like you're jumping into the best bits of some of the finest cartoons ever made. The voices are also spot on, as many of the original actors reprise their roles. And the likes of Haley Joel Osment and David Boreanaz lend their vocal talents to the newcomers with remarkable success. The music is of a similarly high standard and is also as true to the original works as is possible – in fact, *Kingdom Hearts* is probably the most authentic recreation of the Disney universe ever seen on a console, which makes the game a joy to play.

Comparisons to Square's flagship *Final Fantasy* series are way off the mark. Although several characters and spells are given new life in this cutesy world, the actual battles take place in real time and function more like a three-dimensional version of *Secret Of Mana* or a more frantic *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. Thankfully, targets can be locked onto – there are often a lot of enemies on screen at once and it's good to know which one you're attacking. In addition to kitting yourself out with all manner of items, your two companions can be equipped with weapons and provisions and then show reasonable intelligence and diligence when using them. The only gripes with the combat system are that it's always pretty hectic

FAQs

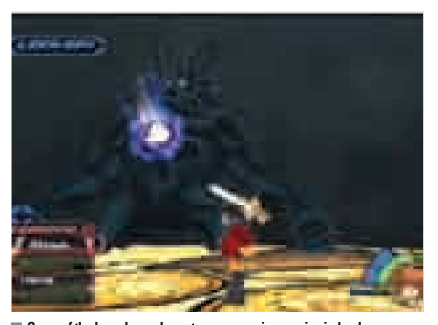
Q. PLAYING TIME?
According to Square, somewhere in the region of 30-40 hours on your first time through the game.

Q. TURN-BASED BATTLES?
Not this time – think less *Final Fantasy* and more *Secret Of Mana*.

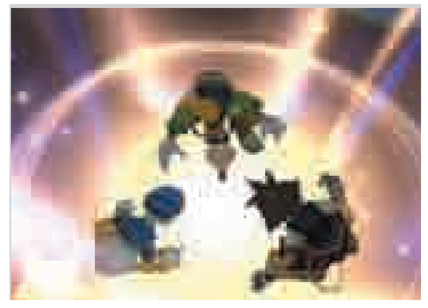
Q. CO-OPERATIVE PLAY?
Sadly not – it would have been great having your friends taking control of Goofy and Donald.

FANTASY FAVOURITES

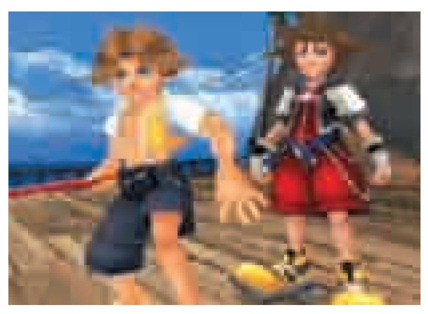
Followers of Square's long-running *Final Fantasy* series will be overjoyed with some of the characters that make appearances here. Within the first few hours, you're reintroduced to the likes of Tidus, Wakka, Squall, Yuffie and Aeris, albeit in younger and more cartoony forms. Even the fabled Cid shows his face, this time running a shop in the first proper town you visit. And to top it all off, some friendly Moogles are also roaming the streets.



Some of the huge boss characters are very impressive indeed… although you wouldn't want to meet them in a dark alley.



Special team-up moves can be performed wherever there's a Trinity Logo; these usually grant access to hidden areas.





and therefore sometimes a little confusing. Also, some battles are exceptionally tough – despite the game's childish appearance, things can get very difficult at times (although the continuing system is very lenient and gaining a few levels before returning to a difficult boss will often do the trick).

The main goal of the game is to save each individual 'world' in turn – each of these is themed around one of Disney's animated classics and the areas within them are often quite large. Although some are initially daunting and confusing, most locations are quite easy to navigate after a brief tour of what the place has to offer – Tarzan's enormous jungle home is the first obvious example of such a situation. Disney's platform game heritage also shines through with a few tricky jumping sections, although these tend to remain difficult only for as long as it takes to master Sora's somewhat floaty jumping (not a major grumble but it does frustrate a little until you get used to it).

Travelling between these worlds is done in the Gummi Ship, a fully customisable rocket that whisks you through space in a fairly basic shoot-'em-up mini-game. Extra parts for your ship can be claimed from defeated enemies and while this section of the game is the weakest both visually and structurally, it's still pretty enjoyable and breaks up the adventuring action nicely.



Despite the fact that there's no block button, enemy blows can be parried with an attack of your own.

Unfortunately, Disney's predominantly 'kiddy' image will put many people off this game; even those who normally enjoy Squaresoft's titles. This is a shame as, despite the childish appearance, *Kingdom Hearts* is blessed with the typically twisting and turning plot we've come to expect from Square as well as action that would put most 'grown-up' releases to shame. There are a few slight niggles with the camera (although these can usually be corrected with the shoulder buttons) but besides these, there's a lot of fun to be had. It'll take you an age to find everything although, as is usually the case with RPGs, once you've gone through the game once you probably won't find yourself playing through again. Disney or Square fanatics will definitely get the most out of this one, but the rest of the world will find more than enough to warrant the asking price and hold interest for a while to come.



SQUARE WORKS ITS MAGIC ON THE DISNEY WORLD



Are you really small? Or is that key really big? If only Rick Moranis were here, he knows all about this sort of thing.



You march right on up to that pesky playing card and give him what for. Go on, shuffle him up something good…



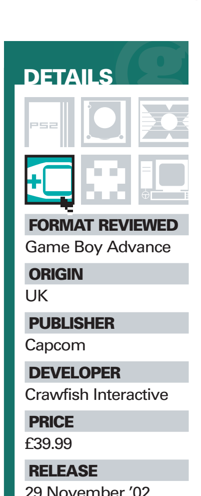

Dan's background is among the additions to the European release of the GBA game.


Thirty one initial characters plus numerous hidden fighters make for literally thousands of battle combinations.



STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3

A NEAR-PERFECT DREAMCAST PORT ON A HANDHELD? GET OUTTA HERE…



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
Crawfish Interactive

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
29 November '02

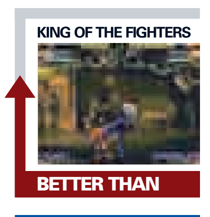
PLAYERS
1-2

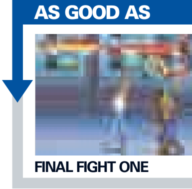
There can't be a gamer alive who hasn't played *Street Fighter* in one of its many guises over the years. Like it or not, the countless re-workings across every format known to man (including handhelds) have been practically unavoidable. After the lukewarm start made by *Super Street Fighter II Turbo Revival* though, Nintendo's powerful portable has a translation of arguably the finest jewel in Capcom's crown. Those who said it couldn't be done are being handed a chunky slice of humble pie by Crawfish (who also ported the excellent *Speedball 2*). Not content with shrinking the entire arcade game into a tiny cartridge, three extra hidden characters (Yun, Maki and Eagle) have been added to spice up the proceedings. This brings the overall tally of fighters up to 38, the most to appear in a dedicated *Street Fighter* title to date.

Obviously, the character sprites aren't as detailed as their console and arcade brethren, but this is more than made up for by the gorgeous animation. Every one of the fighters moves exceptionally smoothly (even more so than in the PSone version) and every single move and technique has made the transition to the handheld intact. The only negative point in this respect is the control system – with the game originally designed for two buttons more than the GBA offers, certain moves and combinations are rendered particularly difficult to pull off. In addition, the small D-pad can make rotation moves – a major part of the game – a little inconsistent, but, in most cases, this can be overcome with a bit of practice.

Sound is probably the weakest area, although even this is far from poor. Much of the classic audio and speech has shrunk down nicely but there are a few instances where clips are reused or omitted to save memory; this is understandable really when you consider the monumental task undertaken by Crawfish in this project. In essence, what we have here is a testament to the technical capabilities of the Game Boy Advance – smooth running and a joy to play, the few shortcomings are overshadowed by the sheer size and quality of the finished product. Purists may argue that the button set-up leaves too much to chance but, while this is partially true, a good hour or so of play should see you Dragon Punching with the best of them. For anyone who likes the idea of playing *Street Fighter* on the move (and that's quite a lot of us), Crawfish has done the impossible and given the handheld market a fighter of which it can be truly proud.


VERDICT 8/10
THE BEST FIGHTER ON THE GBA, BAR NONE





WE'VE SEEN MECH COMBAT GAMES BEFORE – THEY JUST HAVEN'T BEEN THIS FAST…

PHANTOM CRASH

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Phantagram

DEVELOPER
Genki

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

Once in a while, a game comes from completely out of the blue and surprises lucky players with something unexpectedly special. This is the case with *Phantom Crash*. Without so much as a hint that it was on the way, we knew next to nothing about this game until we had it in our hands. Initial impressions were reminiscent of the *Virtual On* games – high-speed, hi-tech high explosives galore. However, the deeper you look, the more you find. The Quest Mode is unbelievably in-depth for this type of game – its layout is most easily compared to the *Gran Turismo* series, although possibly more detailed still. You start by either purchasing a 'Scoobee' (a battle mech used in the sport of 'Rumbling') which you can upgrade as you wish, or by building your own mech from the ground up. Once equipped, you're ready to go to battle…

Phantom Crash is fast. Very fast. As your Scoobee tears around the lavish arenas with guns and rockets blazing, you earn cash for the damage caused to surroundings and other mechs. This cash can then be spent on upgrades for your robot suit or on entire new mechs, and the level of customisation possible is truly astounding. You want tank tracks? Buy them. Want a huge rocket launcher? Go for it. Even the paint job and logo can be set up exactly as you want to make your Scoobee your own. As you progress, you'll be challenged by rivals, move up rankings and the storyline (another oft-forgotten element in mech games) will evolve around you. As if that wasn't enough, Genki has included an excellent four-player mode where you can use one of a selection of pre-made Scoobees or import one from a Quest saved on the hard drive.

Graphically and sonically, *Phantom Crash* is a joy. Once again, the Xbox uses loads of graphical effects at once with very impressive results, while the soundtrack constantly grows as you play – the eclectic mix of J-pop, ambient, dance and more expands as you buy new tunes from the in-game shop. In all fairness, there's not much variety to the game's many battles; as nice as the arenas and robots are, the basic gameplay comes down to little more than shooting and dodging. Despite this, the depth and enjoyability of Quest Mode takes what could have been another average shooter and turns it into one of the finest pieces of action software on the Xbox.

VERDICT 7/10
SIMPLE GAMEPLAY BUT STILL AN UNEXPECTED GEM

games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
PUSH THE TEMPO: *Phantom Crash's* speed is a refreshing change from other strategic mech titles.
IN TOO DEEP: The Quest Mode adds RPG-style depth to the blasting action.

GUNVALKYRIE

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

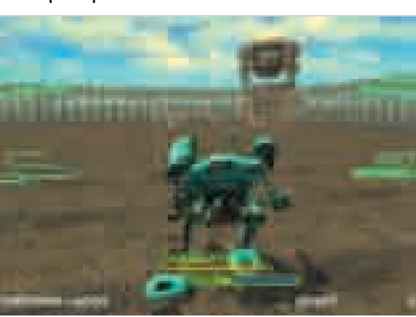
MECHWARRIOR 4

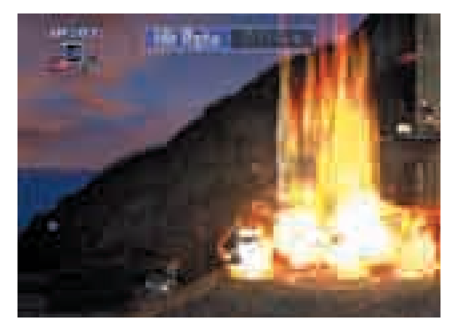


Many of the lock-on weapons can be avoided by using the Scoobee's 'Optical Camouflage' (that's a cloaking device to you and me). As for member 449 and his Warrior Hood, you might want to steer clear, just in case he wants to show you some puppies as well…



Piece together your ultimate 'Scoobee' from literally hundreds of unique components.


What a lovely day to take your Scoobee out for a spin. No need to worry about Sunday drivers either. They're in the way? Blow them up. Simple.



Seemingly harmless bullets can burst into huge explosions just when you least expect it.



Three different weapons are included – shotgun, flame-thrower and grenades. Make sure you use the right one in the right situation.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99 (£32)

RELEASE
March 2003 (Japan: Dec, US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

CONTRA: SHATTERED SOLDIER

CAN AN UPDATE OF THIS KONAMI CLASSIC REKINDLE INTEREST IN THE SERIES?

Konami made retro fans happy when it released *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* on PSone. Instead of taking the rather predictable 3D approach with the game, the company chose to keep the style as close as possible to the prequels – featuring traditional side-scrolling gameplay spliced with the occasional 3D set piece to break up the otherwise 2D graphics. Well, it's now five years later and Konami has seen fit to resurrect another of its popular series from the past – this time *Contra* (or *Super Probotector* as it was known in the West). Just like the approach taken with *Symphony Of The Night*, this game has been developed to be as familiar as possible to those who enjoyed the old *Contra* games, with the SNES version in particular having many parallels both in terms of level structure and visuals. But while there's no disputing that this will provide happy memories for older gamers, the big question is whether this can still cut it next to the titles available today.

Well, the truth of the matter is that the *Castlevania* series was updated significantly for its release on PSone. Despite its old school visuals, the structure of *Symphony Of The Night* had been expanded over the prequels to incorporate RPG-esque elements, giving fans of the series something new to get their teeth into and substantially increasing the game's longevity. *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, by comparison, follows



You can run, but can you hide? Even better, can you shoot that thing down in a ball of twisted metal and flame?



Don't shoot behind you, mate – have you seen what's hanging over your head…?



While the introduction of 3D cut-scenes certainly brings the series up to date, they do little to increase the overall quality or atmosphere.

FAQs

Q. END OF LEVEL BOSSES?
Absolutely! And they're every bit as impressive as the ones in the prequels.

Q. CUT SCENES?
Konami has introduced cut-scenes at the end of each level. They're very cheesy and really don't enhance the game in any way at all.

Q. GOOD MUSIC?
Konami's games usually include great tunes, but this contains pretty awful thrash metal. It gets the job done, but it's certainly not going to win any awards.

Even when you've got something big to worry about, like an exploding car, there are still soldiers taking a pop at you.



games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

2D OR NOT 2D: Although the gameplay is still on a 2D axis, Konami has used the power of PS2 to give the impression of 3D. This brings the game up-to-date whilst retaining the flavour of the prequels.

the structure of its prequels pretty much identically – a prospect which may sound attractive to purists and a commendably bold thing to attempt on Konami's part, but it's only when you actually play the game that you discover just how badly the series has dated. You see, the *Contra* games have always been about action – jump, shoot, jump, shoot… that's about it. And it really doesn't take very long before it all becomes mind-numbingly tedious – especially when you take the excessively hard difficulty setting into account.

Of course, the *Contra* games were always on the tricky side, but this one really is quite ridiculous. Attacks come from all angles and seem to explode in random directions, usually when you least expect it. Often you'll be concentrating on your attacks hitting a target whilst avoiding a stream of bullets, when a grenade will sneakily bounce onto the screen obscured by flames that have spontaneously ignited all around you. And then in a single hit you're dead. You do get eight lives and 99 continues on the Easy setting, but you soon get through the lives and continuing starts you right back at the beginning of the level. It's even more extreme on the Normal setting, as you get just three lives and three continues.

But, while *Shattered Soldier* is far from being the cult classic we hoped it would be, there's still a fair amount of fun to be had. Four levels are available from the outset, meaning that you have a choice of locations to play, even if the ludicrous difficulty setting prevents you from ever completing a single one. There's plenty of variation included too – you can be on foot one minute, snowboarding the next and flying over the ocean on a missile just a short while later. It was this sort of imaginative design that attracted gamers to the prequels and it's the one single element that really shines through above all else. It's clear that Konami still employs some of the most talented graphic artists and designers around – even though their produce is occasionally a little off the mark, as it is here.

Is it worth spending money on? The answer is… maybe. We wouldn't be surprised if Konami only releases a limited quantity in the UK due to its niche market appeal and, if it does, the chances are that it could become extremely valuable a few months after its release. Just look at *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* – at one point the game was available for around £20, though you'd be hard pushed to pick it up for less then £40 now, with mint copies selling for as much as £70 on eBay. Of course there's no guarantee that *Contra: Shattered Soldier* will be as highly regarded by hard-core gamers, but even if it isn't, this is still a solid little game that blends today's technology with the simplicity of yesteryear.

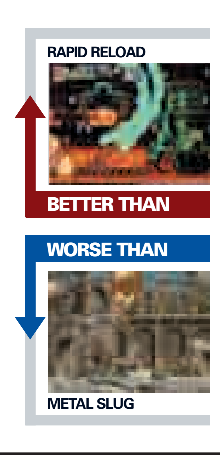


VERDICT 5/10
FAITHFUL TO THE SERIES, BUT CERTAINLY NO CLASSIC

A NEW BEGINNING

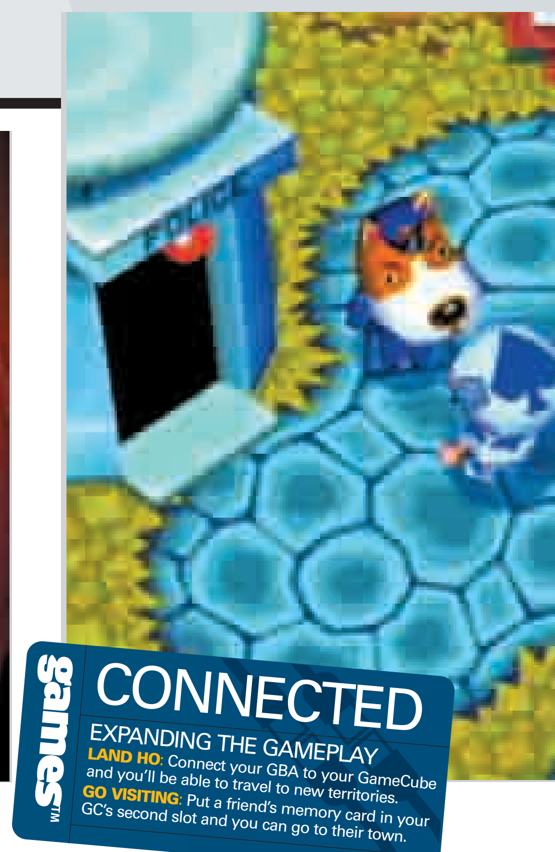
Although the core gameplay remains mostly unchanged from the prequels, Konami has completely overhauled the front end. Instead of having to finish one level before progressing to the next, you now have a choice of four to begin with, ranging from hard to near impossible. Another nice addition is a hit percentage counter that adds up every bad guy killed and every target destroyed as you progress through each stage. At the end of the level the percentage is added to your remaining lives and continues, then converted into a ranking, giving gamers who enjoy beating high scores a reason to play through the levels again.








The post office is not only used for mailing letters and parcels to the other villagers, but also for receiving information from the Game Boy Advance e-card reader. And, what with this being a game and everything, there aren't any queues of old ladies with shopping trollies and snuffly little dogs.



games™ CONNECTED

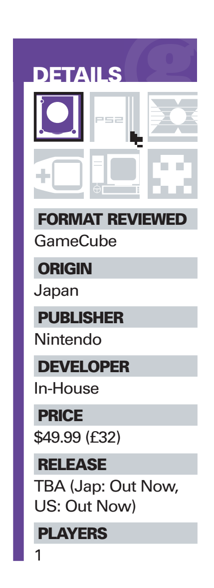
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

LAND HO: Connect your GBA to your GameCube and you'll be able to travel to new territories.

GO VISITING: Put a friend's memory card in your GC's second slot and you can go to their town.

ANIMAL CROSSING

NINTENDO RELEASES ITS FIRST TRULY INNOVATIVE GAMECUBE TITLE SINCE PIKMIN. BUT IS IT ANY GOOD?



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

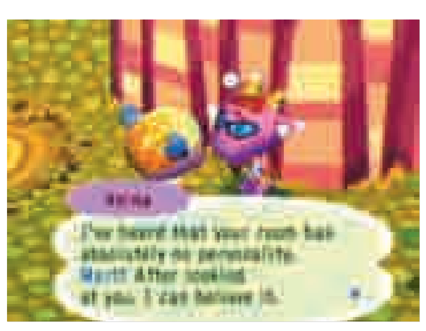
PRICE
$49.99 (£32)

RELEASE
TBA (Jap: Out Now, US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Sometimes a game comes along that pushes back creative boundaries. *Animal Crossing* is one such title, taking interaction between human and CPU-controlled characters to exciting new places. So it's sad to think that *Animal Crossing* may be ignored by the mass-market because of the poor visuals: textures are jagged and fuzzy, trees are represented by 2D sprites and polygon counts are, quite frankly, pathetic. But it doesn't take long to discover that what this lacks in graphics it more than makes up for in gameplay and innovation…

The adventure begins with a train journey to your new town, during which a friendly cat checks your name, gender and other personal details before making your housing arrangements. This is all done in typical Nintendo nonsense language, although the scripting is not unlike the witty sarcasm we've come to expect from Rare. Step off the train and you're introduced to a gaming experience unlike any other. Although immediate comparisons would have to be with *Pokémon* or *Harvest Moon*, *Animal Crossing* is a virtual life in which everything you do affects the way your world evolves. Each villager has their


The villagers tend to be incredibly fickle. It's easy to win their friendship by sending them a letter or helping them with everyday tasks.

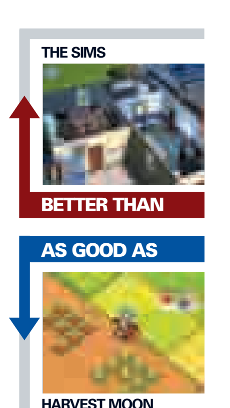

You can often find all sorts of goodies hidden in the trees. But shake the branches too much and you may get a different kind of surprise…

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Each adventure is programmed to last for 30 years.

Q. IT'S A KID'S GAME!
No, it's not; the nature of the game means that anyone of any age can enjoy *Animal Crossing*.

Q. ISN'T IT BORING?
Not in the slightest – thanks its charm and character, even the most mundane-sounding tasks are utterly compelling.



THE SIMS
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS
HARVEST MOON



The police station is a great place to claim lost items – even if they don't really belong to you. You can also get a map of the village if you ask the police dog nicely.



Bugs and insects tend to be more numerous during the evening. If you have a net you can catch them and either donate them to the museum or cash them in at the store.

own personality and it's possible to form alliances with them by running errands or sending them a flattering letter and gift. This communication encourages a two-way relationship that helps you acquire furniture and numerous luxury items..

Before you can start making friends however, you'll have to pay off your mortgage by working at the local store – which, handily, is where much of the innovative gameplay becomes apparent. You see, by talking to the shopkeeper it's possible to send items to other *Animal Crossing* gamers. Each town starts with only one type of fruit growing on the trees and other items, such as shovels for digging up treasure and nets for catching bugs, only become available later on. But if one of your friends is further into their adventure they can send these items to you in advance. This exchange system benefits both players, as items that aren't immediately available tend to be worth big bucks when cashed-in at the store. This money can then be used to pay for extensions on your house, new furniture and anything else the store sells.

But trading is not the only way of communicating with your friends – by far the most inventive method is to insert their memory card into your GameCubes's second slot and visit their village. You can then pick their fruit, shop in their store and befriend their villagers… some of whom may even relocate to your town. In fact, the way villagers come and go is something that prevents *Animal Crossing* from ever becoming dull. All sorts of hilarious characters move around of their own accord and each has their own personality – one of the strangest we've seen is Gracie, a giraffe who drives a red sports car and offers fashion tips in return for a car wash. Another aspect that extends the longevity is the calendar of annual events, including delights such as sports fairs, fishing tournaments and all the usual holidays. The village clocks run according to the GameCube's internal clock so it's up to you to play the game on each of these days – if you miss these special occasions, you'll have to wait a whole year before you can try them again.

With all its unique features, innovative ideas and cutesy characters, *Animal Crossing* is something rather special. Of course, we can't help feeling that it will soon be superceded – especially where the multiplayer aspect of the game is concerned. While there are some clever player link-up features, it's obvious that this would benefit from being online. With the current system for exploring other villages, any player-controlled characters that live there are absent during your trip, as each village can only cope with one human-controlled character at a time. Fortunately, an online version of the game is planned for release in 2003 and we're hoping multiplayer tasks will be available when linked-up and visiting other villages. For now though, *Animal Crossing* is a fantastically bold attempt at trying something new. At a time when we're led to believe that aesthetic novelties are crucial to the quality of a game, Nintendo has once again proved that great, original games don't always have to rely on high-end technology. Bravo, Nintendo…



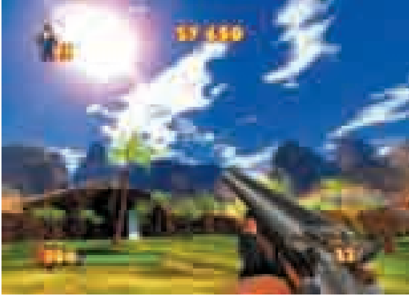
PICK A CARD

Another of Nintendo's little innovations is the e-Reader – a Game Boy Advance add-on with a slot for swiping a selection of digitally enhanced playing e-cards. A magnetic strip along the side and top of the card contains information such as character details, artwork and even mini-games that can be played on the GBA itself. The first sets of cards to be released include a new generation of Pokémon cards, a selection of NES games and 66 *Animal Crossing* cards containing data that can be uploaded into the GameCube via the Nintendo GameCube Game Boy Advance Cable. The extras include new items, songs and textures.

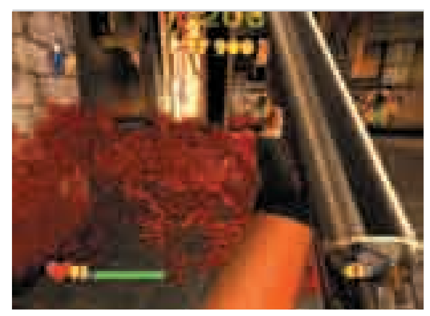
VERDICT 8/10
ACHIEVES GREATNESS IN WAYS YOU NEVER IMAGINED



Sure, the explosions are big and fun (is there any other sort of explosion?) but you can have too much of a good thing, and with little else to hold your interest here you might just wander off to check on that grouting or worm the cat.



You can take your shotgun outside, which makes a nice change from all those dingy tunnels – they're so unhealthy…



Destroying marauding enemies is satisfyingly splattery, but sometimes you just want something else to do.

SERIOUS SAM

RATHER THAN COMPETING WITH HALO AND TIMESPLITTERS 2, CROTEAM HAS TAKEN THE FPS GENRE BACK TO BASICS.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TWO IN ONE: The Xbox game incorporates levels from both *Serious Sam* games on the PC.

MULTIPLAYER: On Xbox, for four players can compete against each other on one console.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Take 2 Interactive

DEVELOPER
Croteam

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16 (via console link)



When *Halo* was released, it set new standards for epic battles and artificial intelligence in first-person shoot-'em-ups and, indeed, videogames in general. Similarly, Free Radical's *TimeSplitters 2* offered its audience a comprehensive line-up of multiplayer options, plus a solid one-player game with plenty of missions and objectives. *Serious Sam*, by direct contrast, does none of these things. Not because the developers have overlooked them, but because they've tried to create a title with the purity and fun factor of classic titles like *Doom* and *Duke Nukem*. While the game certainly achieves what it sets out to do, it's astonishing to see how far things have moved on over the past few years. In fact, it's debatable whether such a decidedly retro release is even feasible next to today's market leaders, particularly now that *Doom*, *Duke Nukem* and many other older games can be downloaded for free from the Internet.

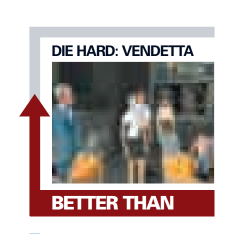
The truth of the matter is that *Serious Sam* isn't aimed at the mass-market – it's very much for the hard-core gamer who remembers the days of *Doom* and wouldn't mind a quick blast on something similar. In fact, the game is remarkably similar to id Software's classic title: levers and floor switches unlock doors, activate lifts and, more importantly, summon vast hordes of bad guys whose sole purpose is to eviscerate, immolate or otherwise destroy Serious Sam. Luckily, Sam is equipped with a massive arsenal of weaponry ranging from a basic shotgun through to rather more excessive artillery, such as a vintage cannon.

As you'd expect with so many weapons, the action is a simple case of destroying anything that moves, although the levels themselves tend to be quite structured. Each has a few open areas in which large scale battles take place, with many smaller corridors linking them together. The problem is that while this works well initially, it all becomes very samey in no time at all – and this is where the game falls down. It's all very well trying to resurrect the simplicity of the *Doom* era, but in practice this title really doesn't have the longevity that we've come to expect from modern first-person shooters. There's no disputing that *Serious Sam* is great fun while it lasts, but the problem is that you'll be returning to games like *Halo* or *TimeSplitters 2* the same day you buy this.



VERDICT 5/10
FUN, BUT A BIT OF A ONE TRICK PONY

DIE HARD: VENDETTA

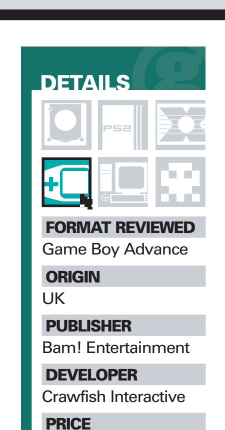


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



NIGHTFIRE



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Bam! Entertainment

DEVELOPER
Crawfish Interactive

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
29 November '02

PLAYERS
1-4

YES, IT'S A SEQUEL… AND WE HAVEN'T EVEN SEEN THE FILM YET

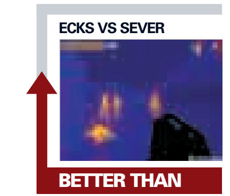
ECKS VS SEVER: BALLISTIC

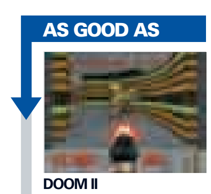
Having become so accustomed to seeing shoddy movie-licensed games arrive months, sometimes years, after the film's release, the original *Ecks Vs Sever* came as something of a pleasant surprise. While nothing groundbreaking, it was timely proof that the Game Boy Advance was more than capable of producing a decent first-person shoot-'em-up. Bizarrely though, the game has spawned a sequel despite the fact that the film hasn't even seen light of day on these shores yet. This time around, we've got sharper graphics, clearer sound and missions more fluid and logical than in the original – clearly, the GBA is being pushed to the limit in order to allow Crawfish to work its pocket gaming magic once more.

The most apparent improvement from the off is the new, more ambitious level design. The cramped corridors and box rooms that made up a lot of the first game make only a brief return, while we're mostly treated to some larger open-plan areas. Admittedly, some of these environments are somewhat primitive in design, but considering the hardware running them, they're little short of a technical marvel. Annoyingly, the GBA button layout doesn't lend itself particularly well to first-person shooters; although the game is perfectly playable, anyone who has recently played any console FPS will most likely find the controls frustratingly clunky.

Choosing Agent Ecks or Agent Sever takes you through two different campaigns; Ecks has a more gung-ho approach while Sever's missions are more reliant on stealth. Either way, the tasks are well-structured and streets ahead of the competition. There's also the opportunity to go head-to-head in a selection of game modes via link-up play. While quite entertaining, many of the levels are too large and complex to be enjoyed by less than the maximum number of players. Get enough people together and it's a blast – it's just a shame that less than four players can't enjoy a similar experience. To be honest, it's difficult to imagine where the handheld FPS genre can go from here – *Ecks Vs Sever: Ballistic* obviously squeezes a lot out of the GBA and it's hard to see any future title significantly bettering this in terms of graphics or gameplay. As good as it is though, the sad truth is that it's still one of the best examples of a genre ill-suited to the handheld format.

VERDICT 7/10
THE MOST MATURE SHOOTER ON THE GBA

ECKS VS SEVER

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

DOOM II



Thanks to the four-player link-up you can shoot at your mates as well as a bevy of computer-generated baddies.

That red dot could be marking the location of a deadly assassin. Or it could be a mark on your screen. Best give it a wipe to make sure…

It might not look like much here, but *Ecks Vs Sever* is one of the slickest first-person shoot-'em-ups we've seen on the GBA. Although if this screenshot is anything to go by, it's also a stab-'em-up…


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.1 DECEMBER 2002
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
GREATEST GAME EVER
WE REPLAY THE CLASSIC SPACE BATTLE GAME ELITE
THIS MONTH IN 1992
WHAT WERE WE PLAYING BACK THEN?
VIDEOGAME HISTORY LOOKBACK
FROM PONG TO POKÉMON TO THE PRESENT DAY
PLUS CLASSIC ADS FROM YESTERYEAR!
SPECTRUM
CLASSIC MACHINE OF THE MONTH
MONTHLY ALL-FORMAT RETRO GAMES FUN!
ULTIMATE PLAY THE GAME
CLASSIC GAME SYSTEM BUYERS' GUIDE

Retro

This Month In 1992



Back in November 1992 the world was a very different place. Boyz II Men were riding high at the top of the charts, Bill Clinton became the most powerful man on Earth and a small, blue, spiky mammal went supersonic. Yes, this was a time when SEGA were actually good at marketing.

WORLD NEWS



Democrat William J. Clinton defeated Republican George Bush and independent candidate Ross Perot to become the 42nd President of the United States of America. Clinton would go on to become (in)famous for his exploits with White House intern Monica Lewinski and his seeming lack of understanding as to exactly what does and does not constitute a sexual relationship. If Bill ever offers you a cigar, we strongly recommend you politely decline.

UK CHARTS FOR NOV 1992

1: **End of the Road**
Boyz II Men
2: **People Everyday**
Arrested Development
3: **Would I Lie To You?**
Charles and Eddie
4: **Boss Drum**
The Shamen
5: **Never Let Her Slip Away**
Undercover
6: **Run To You**
Rage
7: **I Will Always Love You**
Whitney Houston
8: **Be My Baby**
Vanessa Paradis
9: **Supermarioland**
Ambassadors of Funk/MC Mario
10: **I'm Gonna Get You**
Bizarre Inc feat. Angie Brown

MEGA DRIVE CHARTS FROM SEGA PRO (No.13)

1: Alien 3
2: The Terminator
3: Euro Club Soccer
4: Taz-Mania
5: Olympic Gold
6: Dragon's Fury
7: Predator 2
8: Bulls Vs Lakers
9: Super Smash TV
10: Krusty's Super Fun House

READER TOP TEN FROM N-FORCE (No.5)

1: Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
2: Legend of Zelda: A Link To The Past
3: Super Mario World
4: Lemmings
5: Sim City
6: The Addams Family
7: Super Soccer
8: Super Tennis
9: Pilot Wings
10: Krusty's Super Fun House

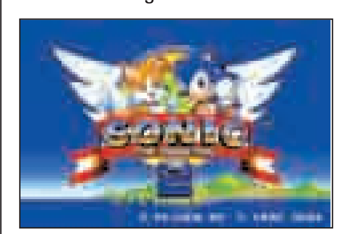
GAMING NEWS '92

HOGGING THE WORLD STAGE…

After the massive success of the original *Sonic The Hedgehog*, SEGA was leaving nothing to chance for the much-anticipated sequel. The former console manufacturer kept a steady stream of information and images flowing regarding its new game – all of which was lapped up by the media. As anticipation for the title reached fever pitch, the firm announced that *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* for the Mega Drive would be afforded a simultaneous release in all territories. November 24 was pencilled in as the big date. This happened to be a Tuesday and some wag in SEGA's marketing department came up with the term '*Sonic 2*'s Day'. Granted, *Sonic 2*'s Day may have been a bad play on words, but as marketing strategies go it was a good deal more effective than blowing most of your budget on sponsoring Arsenal Football Club or employing the vocal talents of Malcolm McLaren to talk over esoteric adverts that didn't show any in-game footage (how did the Dreamcast fail? Answers on a postcard please).

When the game finally arrived, the videogame magazines of the day went into their usual frenzy, with comments such as "improves on its predecessor in every conceivable way" and "this is the fastest game EVER!" abounding. The game was indeed fast (very fast) but this speed came at a price. Developer Sonic Team was making much of a new technique known as "Blast Processing". SEGA tried to convince American gamers (in a tacky advert) that the technique made the Genesis (the US Mega Drive) technically superior to the SNES – this, as we know, is far from the truth. Essentially, "Blast Processing" allowed the game to run at ludicrously fast speeds, but the trade-off was that whilst doing so, background and enemy animations were frozen. Still, it did the job, although the inclusion of a new character, Tails The Fox, seemed to irritate players rather than entertain them.

Sadly, the concept of simultaneous release dates never seemed to catch on. Consequently, European gamers still have to endure massive waits before certain titles arrive in their home territory. Worse still, we have dodgy optimisation and higher prices. As Bruce Hornsby and The Range once wisely pointed out: "That's just the way it is, some things will never change".



Sonic burst onto the Mega Drive amid a frenzy of publicity which no doubt included some hapless sod dressed up as our spiky protagonist.



The formula was largely unchanged in *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* but this time he had his mate Tails to follow him around. A fox we can understand. Where the idea for an echidna came from (*Sonic The Hedgehog 3*) is anyone's guess…

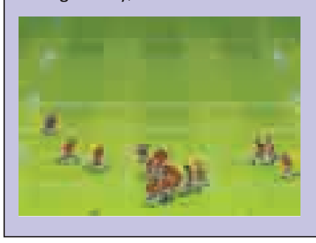
SIX OF THE BEST

Judging by some of the mediocre games that were doing the rounds at the time, we can only presume that publishers were reluctant to put any titles of note up against the mighty *Sonic 2*. They're hardly a vintage crop, but these were the games of November 1992.

JOHN MADDEN 93

Format: **Mega Drive**
Publisher: **Electronic Arts**

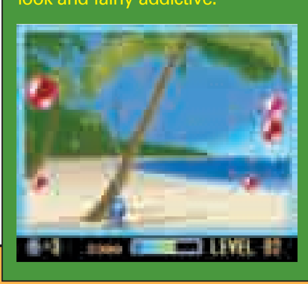
Even a decade ago, EA was indulging in its old updating antics. November 1992 saw the release of *John Madden Football 93* for the then popular Mega Drive system. In case you were wondering, the new game played pretty much like *Madden 92*. Amazing how much things change really, isn't it?



SUPER PANG

Format: **Super Nintendo**
Publisher: **Capcom**

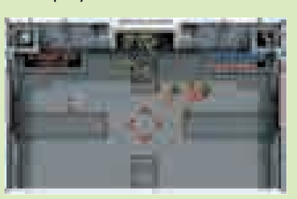
A competent port of the popular Mitchell arcade title, which involved travelling the world and blasting away at bubbles. These then burst into smaller bubbles – hit these and eventually they'd disappear. The omission of the coin-op's two-player mode let things down somewhat, but it was still worth a look and fairly addictive.



SUPER SMASH TV

Format: **Master System**
Publisher: **Acclaim**

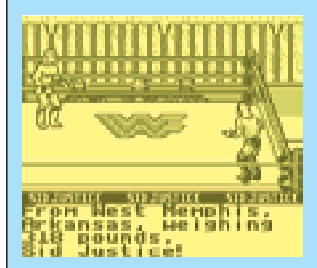
The Super Nintendo had already played host to a cracking conversion of the *Smash TV* coin-op. Unfortunately, the relatively limited design of the Master System pad wasn't up to the job of emulating the two-joystick control system of its arcade parent. Consequently, the conversion was rendered nigh-on unplayable.



WWF SUPERSTARS 2

Format: **Nintendo Game Boy**
Publisher: **Acclaim**

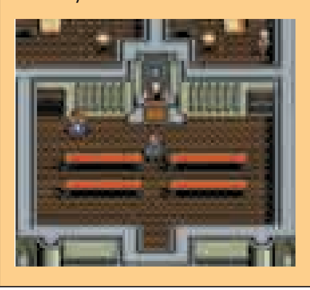
Publisher Acclaim was in overdrive during this period and seemed to be releasing products at a rate of two a day – quantity (not quality) was clearly the watchword. Anyway, as the game's name suggests this average beat-'em-up allowed you to pick from one of six WWF superstars and, erm, wrestle.



SHINING FORCE

Format: **Mega Drive (Japan)**
Publisher: **Sega**

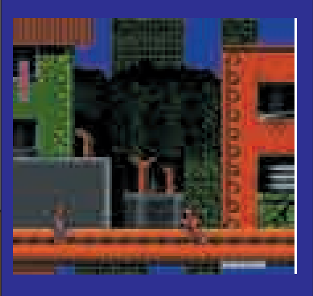
Coming on a hefty 12Mbit cartridge, this polished RPG from SEGA was doing the rounds on the import circuit. Despite favourable reviews from the specialist press, the game failed to take the genre into the mainstream. In fact, the RPG would remain the preserve of obsessive import gamers until the arrival of *Final Fantasy VII* on the first PlayStation.



SPIDER-MAN: RETURN OF THE SINISTER SIX

Format: **NES**
Publisher: **Acclaim**

Spider-Man swung his way onto the fading NES in this mildly diverting platform/action title. The console was obviously showing its age by this time, but this wasn't a bad stab at bringing old web-head to the small screen. Time has not been kind to it however, and a recent look at the game reminded us just how rough some of the NES titles look now.



Obituary

ZZAP! 64 MAGAZINE:

May 1985 – November 1992

By November 1992, the bottom had more or less fallen out of the 8-bit market. Most gamers had, by now, upgraded to more powerful systems such as the SNES. Unsurprisingly, the ten-year-old Commodore 64 just couldn't compete. Still, like a dog with three legs, the once mighty *Zzap! 64* continued to hobble along. Issue 90 appeared in November 1992 and was the last true edition of *Zzap! 64* (in January of 1993 the magazine resurfaced in the guise of *Commodore Force*). New C64 games were extremely thin on the ground and most of the titles reviewed in issue 90 were budget re-releases. The two "Dr. No mega tapes" (containing whole games among other things) on the front of the magazine hinted at the bitter cover-mount war that had been fought between the 8-bit magazines.

The disappearance of *Zzap! 64* from newsagents' shelves marked the end of an era, although, amazingly, *Commodore Force* survived until March 1994. But to be honest, most loyal fans were happy to see the mag laid to rest whilst it still had its dignity. Commodore owners will no doubt remember the Zzap! Sizzler and Gold Medal awards that were given out to only the finest games. Oh, and of course you had Rockford (you had to be there).



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT…

For the first instalment of this regular section, we don our shabby macs and investigate this hugely overlooked detective game from Microsphere.

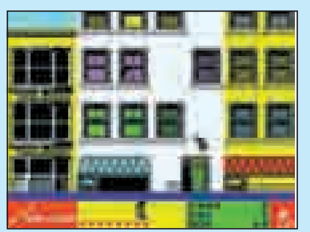
CONTACT SAM CRUISE

Format: **ZX Spectrum**
Producer: **Microsphere**
Year: **1987**

Most gamers who were around during the 8-bit era can recall the quirky delights of Microsphere's *Skool Daze* and its sequel, *Back 2 Skool*. However, mention the name *Contact Sam Cruise* to the same people and more often than not you'll be greeted with a blank expression. Granted, it wasn't a true sequel to the *Skool* games, but it contained many similarities and was in many respects the superior product.

Aside from this title's unusual plot and setting (this was essentially a videogame homage to the film noir genre), a number of other things stood out as being noteworthy. One particularly interesting feature was the way Sam could slip into various disguises, thus allowing him to gain entry into areas without alerting the attention of the cops and local hoods (this has since been borrowed by modern games such as the recent *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*).

A high level of interaction with your surroundings also impressed; blinds could be drawn shut (allowing greater privacy), ringing telephones picked up (the voice at the other end providing cryptic clues) and fuse boxes switched off. The latter came in handy if you needed to escape a populated building under cover of darkness. It was this kind of ingenuity, coupled with the game's dry humour (unusually for a videogame, the gags were fairly amusing) that made *Contact Sam Cruise* such a joy to play.



When entering buildings, the game didn't switch to an internal viewpoint. Instead, you had to gauge Sam's position by looking for him through the windows. Tricky stuff…

Given the limitations of its host platform, Microsphere's game was able to provide a surprisingly deep and subtle gaming experience; one which puts many next-gen titles to shame in terms of generating atmosphere. A modern remake would be most welcome.

Presentation	80%
Graphics	88%
Playability	90%
Addictive qualities	89%
OVERALL	**89%**

Money from a recent bungled robbery frequently floated along the streets – this could be collected before being used to bail Sam out of jail or bribe local hoodlums.



LOOK BACK in ANGER

There's always one, isn't there? You know the sort – the person who swears blind that *Halo* is "all right, but not as atmospheric as *3D Monster Maze* on the ZX81". Or maybe the joker who reckons that *Match Day* is an infinitely more realistic football simulation than *Pro Evolution Soccer*. Now don't get us wrong, we like our vintage games, but there comes a time when you have to concede that some of these oldies have not aged terribly well. That's why we thought it best to look at some of these 'fondly remembered' games and point out that they were actually… well, crap. This month, we take a look at the game that certain individuals have cited as being the spiritual predecessor of *Grand Theft Auto III*. Have they got a point? We don't think so…



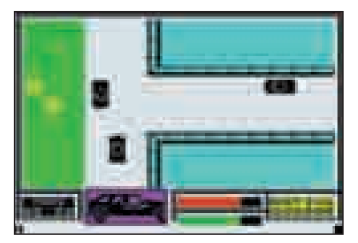
MIAMI VICE

Was it the game that inspired the *Grand Theft Auto* series or was it simply a Crock(ett) of excrement?

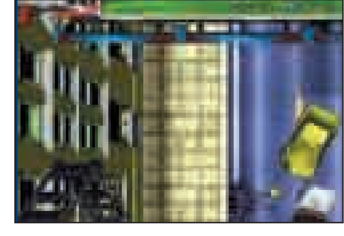
Released back in 1986 for the 8-bit formats, *Miami Vice* was supposed to offer players the chance to sample the lifestyle of the TV show's main protagonists – the "achingly fashionable" Crockett and Tubbs. What it actually boiled down to in terms of gameplay was guiding a brick-like car (which handled like a bus with no steering wheel) around a disappointingly bland-looking Miami. Rather than causing crimes as in *Grand Theft Auto*, your task here was to prevent them by apprehending a number of increasingly dangerous felons. Once you'd located a perp, the action switched to a side-on interior view of the building you were in, as the badly drawn sprite that represented you lurched around the screen with his gun drawn. Once you got your man, it was back into the car for more driving 'action'.

Admittedly, you can see how people could highlight similarities between this and the original *Grand Theft Auto*. For example, both featured cars that you could get out of, both were generally viewed from an overhead perspective and both centred on crime (albeit from different perspectives). Unfortunately, that's where the likeness ends.

To be frank, anyone foolhardy enough to draw comparisons between *Miami Vice* and *Grand Theft Auto* ought to let go of the past. Also, if you really want to be pedantic you could point out that *Miami Vice* was nothing more than a clone of Interceptor Software's *Siren City*, which had come out on the Commodore 64 three years earlier. This, in turn, was a derivative of Namco's *Rally-X*, which itself was a simple variant of *Pac-Man*. So if you take things to an extreme you could argue a case for *GTA Vice City* being based on *Pac-Man*… but then that would just be silly.



The overhead viewpoint of the driving sections is one superficial similarity with the original *GTA*. You're the fella in the black car and you're chasing the other fella in the, er, identical black car.



See, this is *GTA* and you can hardly tell the difference. Apart from the improved graphics. And the superior gameplay. And the varied missions. And the million other things…

GODFATHERS OF GAMING

SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR

Each month, games™ takes a look at a key figure from the world of videogames. The featured individuals may have developed a hugely influential game, created some pioneering hardware or simply come up with an idea that took the industry forward. This issue, we look at Sir Clive Sinclair; you may remember him as 'that bloke who invented the C5', but let's not forget he was also the man who effectively introduced affordable personal computers to the UK…

In terms of advancing the UK home computer market (and, in turn, the videogame industry), Sir Clive Sinclair's contribution cannot be understated. While he didn't code any games himself, his company, Sinclair Computers Ltd, turned computing into a massively popular pastime. Born in 1940, Sir Clive is a classic example of a British eccentric and entrepreneur. His obsession with electronics led to the release in 1980 of the ZX80, which was touted as the world's smallest and cheapest home computer. A newer model, the ZX81, arrived a year later and was a resounding success. However, most gamers will remember Sir Clive for the release of the ZX Spectrum (originally codenamed the ZX82), which initially came in 16K and 48K versions. The machine wasn't really taken seriously by the business or education sectors but the low cost and cheap and cheerful nature of the system ensured it was a massive success with gamers and bedroom coders alike. It also played host to some truly exceptional games. In 1986, Sir Clive sold the rights to all Sinclair products to Amstrad but continues to work on new gadgets. We salute him…



GREAT GAME BOSSES



CONTRA SPIRITS

So you've already fought your way past huge fire-spewing beasts and blown away more troops than were killed in the entirety of *Rambo: First Blood Part II*… what else could the celebrated Super Famicom title *Contra Spirits* (or *Super Probotector* on these shores) throw your way? The answer, put simply, is a whole lot more. After encountering, and eventually killing, the pair of skeletal mechanoids (who made the Terminator look like Doris Day on Prozac) that resided at the end of the third level, you'd think that the job had been done. Sorry sir, that ain't how it goes. After just a second to catch your breath, the wall behind you begins to open up…with two huge hands prising it apart. Oh yes, something bad is going to happen. For want of a better term, "Daddy's home".

When you see the huge skeletal boss pop his head onto the screen, you know that only hard times can lie ahead. Fortunately, our two heroes are quite athletic chaps and can scale the walls to avoid this behemoth's attacks – which is just as well, seeing as how he has a lethal repertoire of moves at his disposal (including one particularly nasty flame attack that follows you round the screen). In addition to dishing it out, this bony swine can take a bit of punishment too; in fact, he only gives up the ghost after you've blasted him with an extraordinary amount of ammo. Who knows, we may see this guy make a reappearance in the forthcoming *Contra: Shattered Soldier* for PS2. Best keep those shotguns at the ready, just in case…

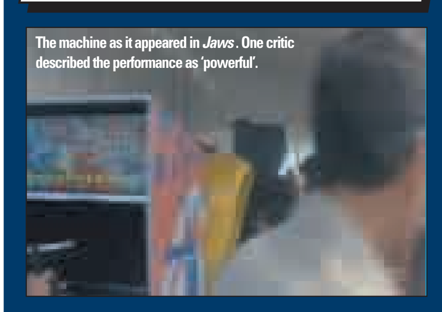


Good Lord, would you look at the size of that thing. It's a good job our hero seems to be wearing metal underpants, he must be bricking it…

STAR GAMES

Some films are made into games, but some games actually appear in films. This month, we look at *Computer Space* – a coin-op with more than one famous appearance.

COMPUTER SPACE



The machine as it appeared in *Jaws*. One critic described the performance as 'powerful'.

Released in 1971, *Computer Space* was the world's first commercial arcade game. Despite coming in a rather stylish yellow cabinet, the relatively complex controls frustrated many players and the title flopped. But that didn't stop it going on to greater things. The machine took a bit part in the 1973 Charlton Heston movie *Soylent Green*, where it could briefly be seen in the background of one scene.

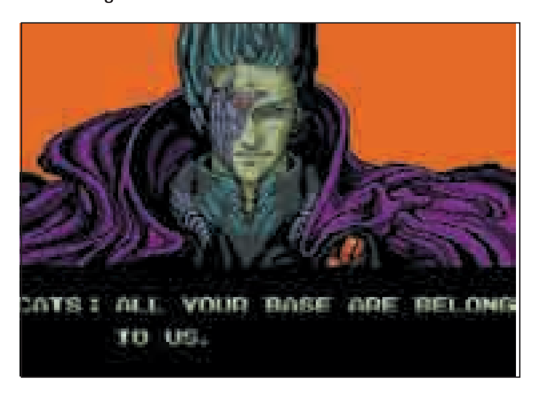
After rave reviews, it clinched a more substantial role in Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, where it delivered an emotionally charged portrayal of a coin-op triumphing over adversity. It earned a Best Supporting Videogame Oscar for the role, but lost out to *Pong*, which scooped the award for its gritty turn as an alcoholic sheriff in the imaginary movie *We Ended Up Having To Eat Each Other.*

ALL YOUR BASE…

We look at some of the worst translations of Japanese text inflicted on gamers – starting with the most famous of all.

ZERO WING

You remember the *All Your Base*… movie that swept across the Internet a while ago, don't you? It was funny the first time round then just became plain annoying. The game footage used in the movie was ripped from the intro sequence of *Zero Wing* on the MegaDrive. It was a fairly entertaining, side-scrolling shoot-'em-up where the player's ship could use a tractor beam to pull in enemy craft and then use them as weapons. All this is academic though – what's important is that the 'All your base…' dialogue stands as a fine example of the dodgy translations that Western gamers had to endure during the 16-bit console era. The amazing thing is that there were even worse offenders out there, which we'll show you over the coming months.



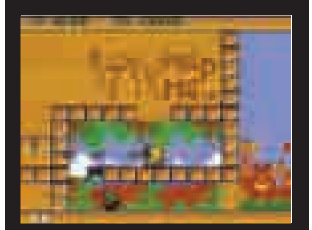


THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

These are just a few of the timeless retro titles that have been stealing hours from the team's busy schedule this month…

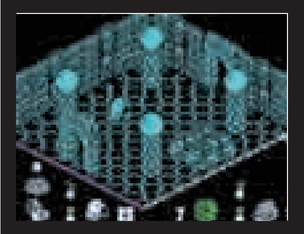
THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

This cutesy platformer was overshadowed by stable mate *Rainbow Islands.* Great level design and memorable characters make this nigh on impossible to stop playing.



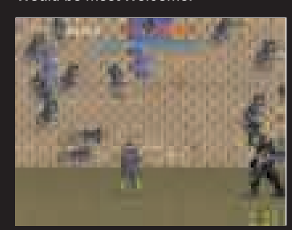
HEAD OVER HEELS

The quintessential 3D isometric adventure. We've still not managed to liberate each of the game's varied planets. Still, at least you can fall back on the Reincarnation Fish.



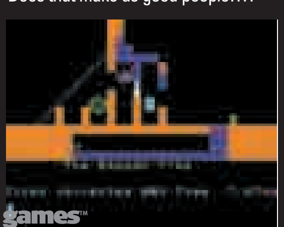
SHINOBI

NO! We are not talking about *Revenge of Shinobi.* The original arcade game was a masterpiece with superlative gameplay. A perfect home conversion would be most welcome.



JET SET WILLY

Our task this month was simply to get through the 'Banyan Tree' stage. After much teeth-gnashing we cleared the screen from the left and right sides. Does that make us good people…?



S·T·R·E·E·T F·I·G·H·T·E·R II

A Great RETRO Gaming Moment

ZANGIEF'S SPINNING PILEDRIVER

Watching the giant Russian take to the air with an unfortunate opponent grasped firmly between his legs was truly a sight to behold – but pulling off the move successfully took a hell of a lot of practice.

For most people, playing *Street Fighter II* for the first time was quite an experience – with eight different characters to choose from (each of which had an extensive list of attacks to learn and master), it was pretty daunting. And with six buttons to utilise, learning to cope with even the standard attacks took a fair bit of time.

Of course, as players became more experienced they began to master the fine art of performing special attacks such as Ryu and Ken's Dragon Punch, Guile's Sonic Boom and Dhalsim's Yoga Flame. Luckily, a brief description of how to perform the special attacks could be found on the *Street Fighter II* cabinets and most of them involved relatively simple inputs such as quarter circles and charges.

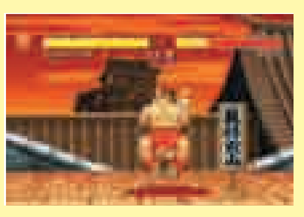
One move, however, was significantly more complex and continued to elude (for a while, at least) even the more experienced players out there. We are, of course, talking about Zangief's Spinning Piledriver attack, which required players to perform a 360° rotation of the joystick whilst standing next to your opponent. At the time, this seemed radically complicated – consequently, many players developed their own ways of performing the move (for example, some began the input whilst in mid-air to give themselves extra time).

Practice, as always, reaped its rewards and the feeling as you successfully used the devastatingly powerful attack for the first time made all the effort invested seem worthwhile. The result was simple, but effective – the big Russian wrestler grabs hold of the enemy and then spirals up into the sky with them clamped between his thighs. As the laws of gravity dictate, "what goes up, must come down" and, not surprisingly, the Piledriver concludes with the victim's head being slammed right into the ground.

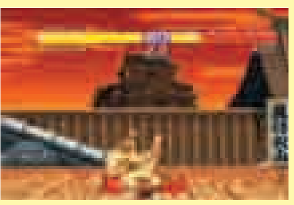
Obviously, later instalments of the series and rival beat-'em-ups introduced far more complicated attacks, which makes the Spinning Piledriver child's play by today's standards. Yet back in 1991, if you could pull off the attack in mid-combat then much kudos would be yours.



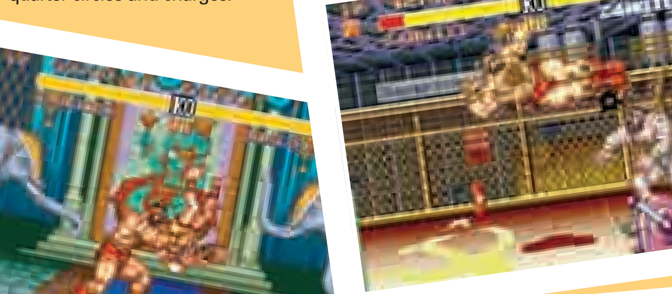
STEP ONE
Get as close as possible to your opponent or the attack will not register.

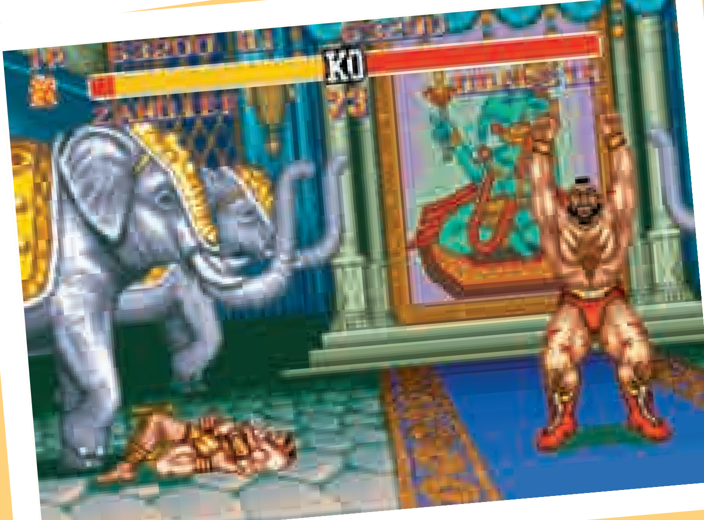


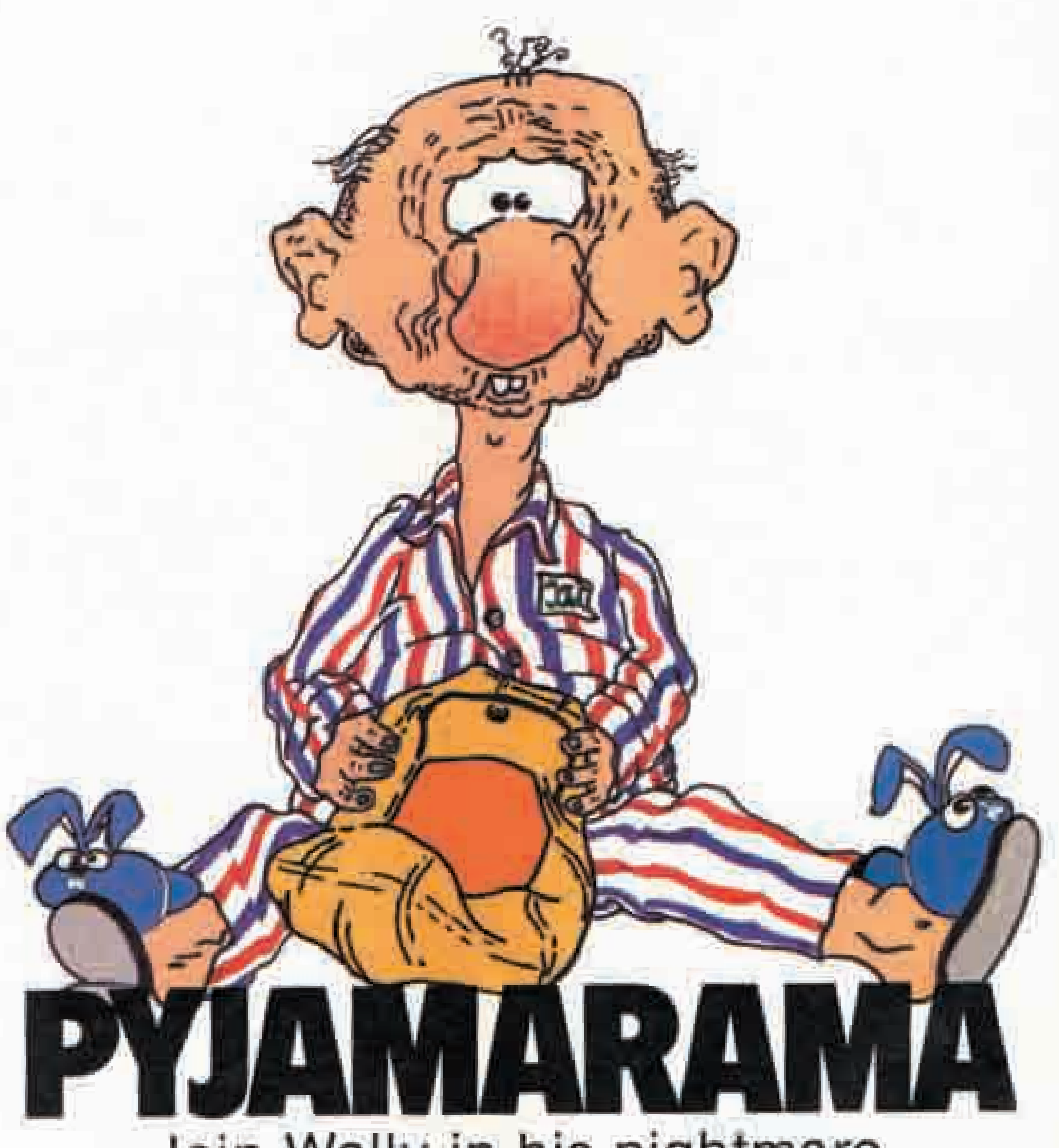
STEP TWO
Up you go into the air in a splendid spiralling display of physical violence.



STEP THREE
As you head back down to terra firma, there can be only one result – watch in awe as your foe's energy bar takes a massive knock.







PYJAMARAMA (Spectrum 48K, C64) Advert first appeared in *Crash* magazine, December 1984



A TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COMPUTER THAT STARTED IT ALL BY POPULARISING HOME GAMING…

IT'S MADE OF RUBBER

The Spectrum's keyboard was made out of rubber, with a membrane underneath that struck the switches and registered a key press. With many code listings in magazines, and users learning how to program BASIC for the first time, keyboards took a real bashing. If you were particularly keen you'd have to replace the rubber membrane a few times.

Launched in April 1982 and coming in either a 16K or 48K model, the 8-bit Sinclair ZX Spectrum was the first foray into computing for many gamers. It was a friendly computer, with spongey rubber keys, a BASIC language that wasn't hard to learn and, best of all, it had hundreds of great games available at pocket money prices. This was the computer that invented the British software industry, with a little help from the Commodore 64. Companies like Ocean, Elite, Software Projects, Bugbyte and Ultimate were creating the equivalent of today's *Grand Theft Auto* and *Metal Gear Solid* but with prices starting at £1.99 (ranging to an extortionate £9.99 for the bigger games). Of course, piracy was also a problem then as it is now, with tape-to-tape recorders churning out copies for friends to swap in the playground. But then this home grown production line also served to give the computer the popularity that it so richly deserved.

POKE ME, PLEASE!

Ahh, the POKE. By writing mini-programs in BASIC, typed in from magazines, players could give themselves infinite lives, health, ammo or fix bugs in the software by POKEing areas of the Spectrum's memory. This worked fine, as long as the listing in the magazine was printed without mistakes.

ZX Spectrum



VARIATIONS
[CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT] Spectrum+ (the same as a 48K Spectrum but with a different case), Spectrum 128K (more RAM for bigger games), Spectrum 128K +2 (with an added tape deck), Spectrum 128K +3 (the tape deck was replaced with a 3" disc drive).

"WHY I LOVE THE ZX SPECTRUM"

To me the Spectrum was more than just a machine for playing games, it was a way of life. Of course, I moved on to the Amiga and eventually the Mac, but I never forgot my first love.

I think that initially it was the cute factor – looks are always important and the Spectrum was a beautiful machine. Then there was the world of possibilities that were open to you. Programming your own games, writing letters on thermal paper, painting with a light pen and, of course, playing games. Personal favourites included *Back 2 Skool*, *Gunfright*, *Roller Coaster* and *Cybernoid*. Just think how great they'd look on a modern plasma screen…

Nick Roberts

Classic Machine

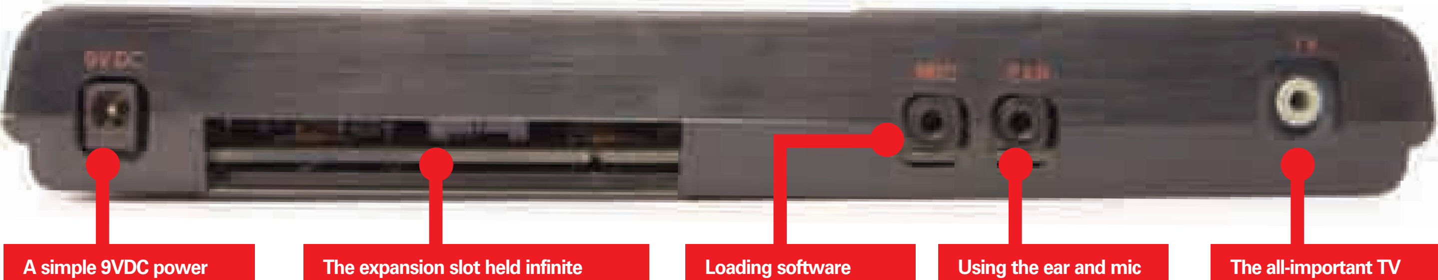
ALL THIS FOR ONLY £175!



SPECIFICATIONS

Sir Clive Sinclair really packed the technology into the Spectrum. It had everything that the bulkier Commodore computers had, but in a small, neat package. The computer is based around the Z80 chip which meant a 256x192 pixel screen and two colours for each 8x8 pixel square (this gave rise to colour clash). A small memory capacity also meant the invention of the multi-load game and the immortal phrase "Press Play On Tape".

Processor	Z80A 3.5Mhz
Memory	16Kb BASIC ROM, 48K RAM
Graphics	256x192 resolution, 8 colours
Size	232x144x33mm
Weight	552g



A simple 9VDC power adaptor was all that was needed to get your Spectrum powered up.

The expansion slot held infinite possibilities. Printers, micro drives, light pens, 32K RAM packs… they were all connected here.

Loading software meant shelling out for a tape recorder too – but any model would do.

Using the ear and mic sockets you could record and play data to and from your tapes.

The all-important TV socket. Many players grew up playing games in black and white.



ZX Spectrum

Classic Machine



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
3 inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's headstart over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

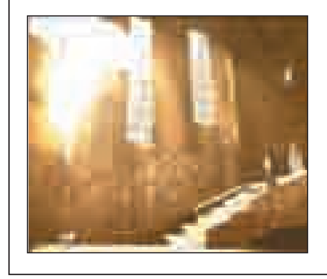




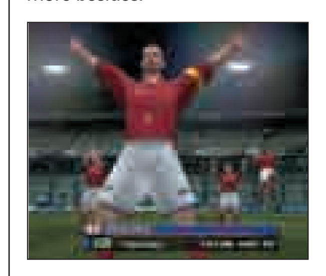
TOP TWENTY PLAYSTATION 2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Take 2	Rockstar
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
10	Kingdom Hearts	SCEE	Squaresoft
11	Sky Odyssey	Sony	Cross
12	Final Fantasy X	SCEE	Squaresoft
13	Capcom VS SNK 2	Capcom	In-House
14	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
15	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
16	Metal Gear Solid 2	Konami	In-House
17	Grand Theft Auto 3	Take 2	Rockstar
18	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
19	Gran Turismo 3: A Spec	SCEE	In-House
20	Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	In-House

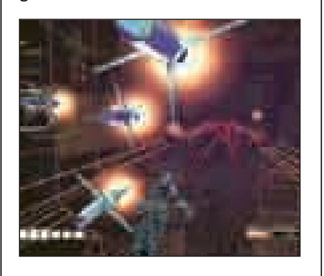
VIEWPOINT
ICO
If you've ever turned your nose up at the thought of playing *Ico*, then… well, you're not the gamer we thought you were. Stunningly beautiful and immensely playable, *Ico* manages to encapsulate all we've ever wanted in a game. An absolute must.



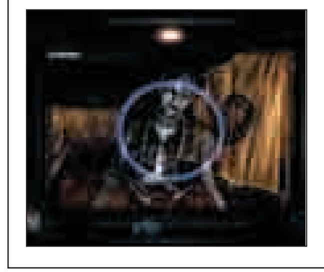
VIEWPOINT
PRO EVOLUTION 2
The high point of the football genre. Konami might have slipped up now and again with the constantly updating *ISS* series, but *Pro Evolution 2* manages to feature virtually everything the fans wanted – and a whole lot more besides.

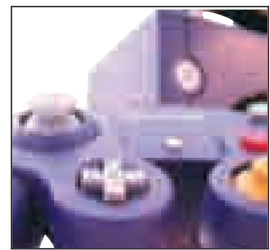


VIEWPOINT
REZ
It might have had ideas borrowed from it for *Frequency*, but SEGA's original musical shoot-'em-up still reigns supreme now that it's defected to the PS2. Don't be fooled by the simplistic graphics – *Rez* is one of the most interesting games of its kind.



VIEWPOINT
PROJECT ZERO
Forget the shock value of the *Resident Evil* series – Tecmo has captured the true meaning of fear with its shockingly scary ghost hunt adventure. We never really wanted to go into a deserted mansion with a camera before, but now… blimey.






GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
4.75 inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Although it's the cheapest one on the market, Nintendo's newest console shouldn't be underestimated. The firm's long-established experience in games means that the GameCube can expect to see many quality first- and third-party games in the future. Primarily a games machine, the GameCube has no DVD function.

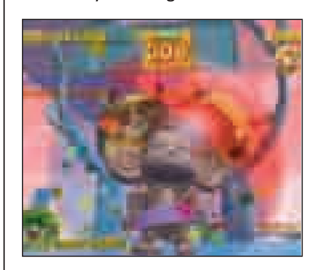




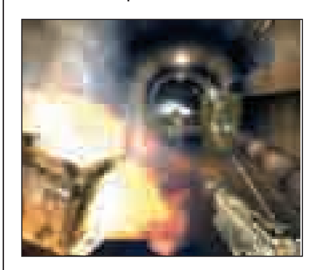
TOP TWENTY GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Super Monkey Ball 2	IMPORT	SEGA	Amusement Vision
2	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
3	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
4	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
5	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
6	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
7	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
8	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
9	StarFox Adventures		Nintendo	Rare
10	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
11	Bomberman Generation	IMPORT	Majesco	Hudson
12	SEGA Soccer Slam		SEGA	Black Box
13	Super Monkey Ball		SEGA	Amusement Vision
14	Aggressive Inline		Acclaim	Z-Axis
15	Doshin The Giant		Nintendo	In-House
16	Super Smash Brothers Melee		Nintendo	In-House
17	Virtua Striker 3 ver.2002		SEGA	Amusement Vision
18	Pikmin		Nintendo	In-House
19	Beach Spikers		SEGA	AM2
20	Ace Golf		Eidos	Telnet

VIEWPOINT
SUPER MONKEY BALL 2
If ever there was a reason to love monkeys, it's *Super Monkey Ball 2.* Taking everything that was good about the original and then making it bigger and better has only gone to prove that SEGA and Amusement Vision really know what they're doing.



VIEWPOINT
TIMESPLITTERS 2
For our money, the GameCube version of *TimeSplitters* gets our vote as the best one – if only because of the incredibly comfortable controller and instant four-player deathmatch action (£24.99 for a PS2 multitap? Pah). An essential purchase.



VIEWPOINT
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE
Mario's latest adventure might not be the massive leap that *Super Mario 64* was, but that doesn't mean it isn't a damn enjoyable game. Making people wait for the first GameCube Mario adventure might have been Nintendo's smartest move to date.



VIEWPOINT
ETERNAL DARKNESS
Better than the remake of *Resident Evil*? We're afraid so. Lasting ages and featuring some genuinely disturbing set-pieces, Silicon Knights's masterpiece was well worth the wait. Sure, it might not look as pretty as *Resident Evil* but looks aren't everything…



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY THOUGH, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75 inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£159.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only a 'PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



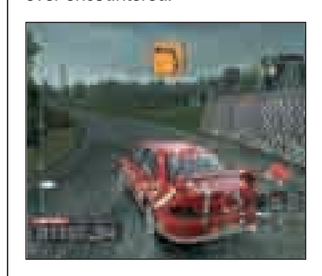
TOP TWENTY XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
5	Colin McRae Rally 3	CodeMasters	In-House
6	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
7	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
8	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
9	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
10	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
11	Quantum Redshift	Microsoft	Curly Monsters
12	Buffy The Vampire Slayer	EA	In-House
13	Phantom Crash	Phantagram	In-House
14	Blinx: The Time Sweeper	Microsoft	Artoon
15	Outlaw Golf	TDK Mediactive	Hypnotix Inc
16	Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2	Activision	HotGen Studios
17	Commandos 2: Men Of Courage	Eidos	In-House
18	RalliSport Challenge	Microsoft	Digital Illusions
19	Transworld Snowboarding	Infogrames	Housemarque
20	GUNVALKYRIE	SEGA	Smilebit

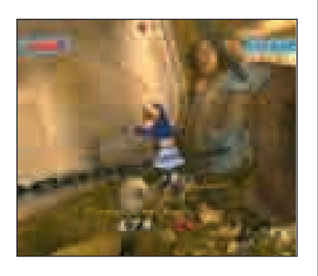
VIEWPOINT
HALO
Okay, so the fact that this made it to the Xbox top spot isn't really that surprising. Despite the fact that not all the *games™* team placed it as their favourite game on the system, this FPS marvel is something really rather special. Can it be beaten?



VIEWPOINT
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 3
In a market with far too many rally games, *Colin McRae* still manages to stand head, shoulders and everything else above the rest. The Xbox version deserves particular credit, just because it's one of the finest racing experiences we've ever encountered.



VIEWPOINT
AGGRESIVE INLINE
Better than *Tony Hawk*? Almost, but it's certainly a top game. With its extra levels and customisable soundtrack, the Xbox version of the game is easily the best of a great bunch – as long as you've got the more functional Controller S, of course.



VIEWPOINT
OUTLAW GOLF
Never heard of it? Don't panic, you're probably not the only one. But anyone with a taste for top golf and even better humour would do well to get *Outlaw Golf*. Strippers, bikers and hilarious golf action – Peter Alliss would not approve. Which is a good thing.













GBA

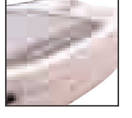
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99

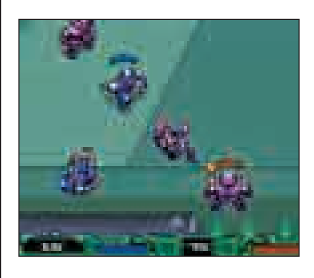


Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. No mean feat for such a small machine.

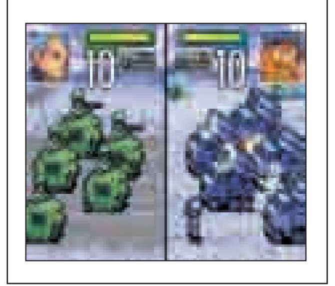
TOP TEN GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish
2	Castlevania: Harmony Of Dissonance	Konami	In-House
3	Golden Sun	Nintendo	Camelot
4	Advance Wars	Nintendo	In-House
5	StreetFighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
6	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
7	Pinball Challenge Deluxe	Ubi Soft	Binary 9
8	Sonic Advance	SEGA	Sonic Team
9	Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	In-House
10	Denki Blocks	Ubi Soft	Denki

VIEWPOINT
SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
Taking us back to the days of jumpers for goalposts, this almost perfect port of a classic title has had our GBAs eating up batteries.



VIEWPOINT
ADVANCE WARS
Quite simply one of the most impressive GBA titles to appear to date. Who'd have thought that strategy games could be such addictive fun on a handheld?



PC

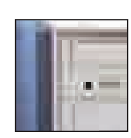
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75 inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable

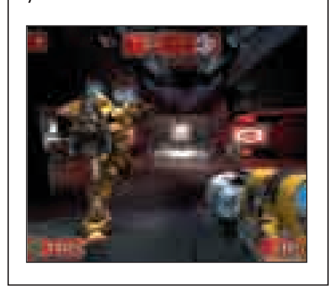


While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'adult' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it is perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Unreal Tournament 2003	Infogrames	Digital Extremes
2	Grand Theft Auto 3	Take 2	Rockstar
3	No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi	Monolith
4	Operation: Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
5	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
6	The Sims	EA	Maxis
7	Counter-Strike	Vivendi	Gearbox Software
8	Rollercoaster Tycoon 2	Infogrames	Chris Sawyer
9	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve
10	Civilization III	Infogrames	Firaxis

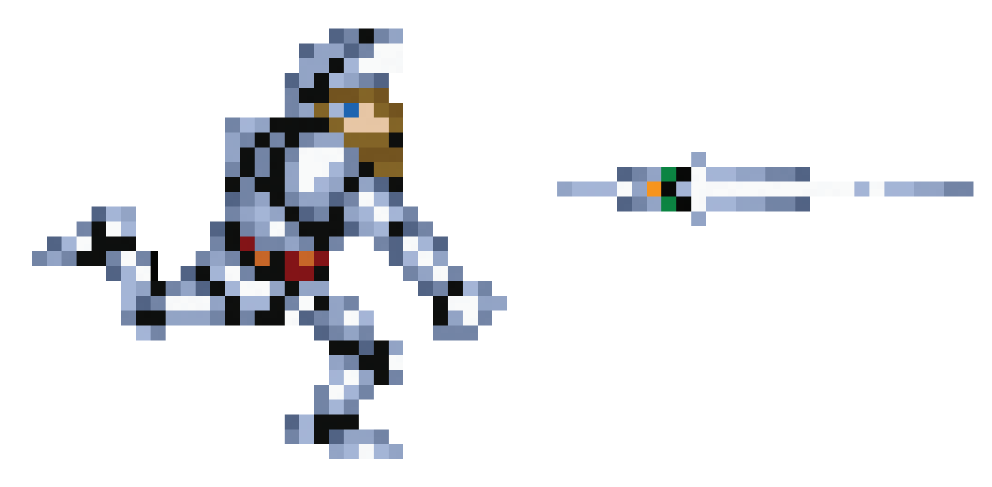
VIEWPOINT
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003
Think the FPS genre can't get any better? Think again. *Unreal Tournament 2003* stomps all over your favourite FPS.



VIEWPOINT
OPERATION: FLASHPOINT
This fine shooter teaches us what it is to be mortal. Forget health packs, this is the real thing. Its scale is only rivalled by *Halo*.




eMag



NEXT ISSUE IN games™

As there's a whopping eight weeks to wait until the next issue of **games™**, we're not very keen on giving away exactly what's in issue 2 at the moment – after all, the last thing we want is people to beat us to the punch when they find out our plans well before we get to do them ourselves. Still, it's not all doom and gloom for those of you wanting an idea of what to look forward to; going on the contents of the mag you're holding in your hands, you can certainly expect plenty of the following:

MORE… INTERVIEWS

In-depth chats with some very important people – most likely lead developers, producers and CEOs in charge of the biggest and best games. As it stands, we've got a whole bunch of interviews lined up – far more than we actually need for next issue, in fact, which means it's going to be packed tighter than a Japanese subway train.

MORE… PREVIEWS

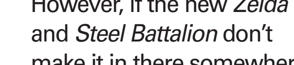
The Christmas period might be the big time for games releases, but that doesn't mean there's nothing coming in the near future. We'll have all the big titles laid bare… although we won't spoil the surprise for you just yet. However, if the new *Zelda* and *Steel Battalion* don't make it in there somewhere, we'll eat our collective hats.

MORE… REVIEWS

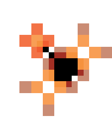
All the decent post-Christmas games worth your attention – plus a few that didn't quite make it into this issue, but demand to be reviewed simply because you'll be thinking about buying them when we hit the shelves. Oh, and probably the odd import review as well, to give you a taste of what we can expect in the coming months.

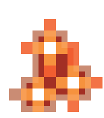
MORE… RETRO

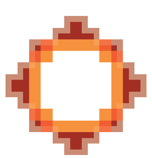
We've hardly even begun to scratch the surface of retro gaming this month, so it's no surprise that we'll be bringing you even more old-school goodness next issue. Right now, we're polishing up some cracking examples of what we loved back in the day, so, hopefully, you'll get all teary-eyed when you read about them.











So there you have it. Whatever we decide to put in there, *games™* issue 2 is definitely going to be180 pages of jam-packed games loveliness. Although come to think of it, there'll be so much more in the next issue that we'll probably need two issues just to fit it all in. Any chance of some more pages then? No? Bugger.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

THIS IS WHERE YOU GET TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Naturally, with this being the first issue of the magazine there isn't a letters page, but next issue all that will change. Oh yes, we're very keen for you good people to write in (or email us) with some intelligent comments about the state of the games industry. However, before you put pen to paper please take a quick look at these incredibly useful and informative writing guidelines:

- ☐ Idiotic comments along the lines of "the Xbox smells of pee pee" will not be printed.
- ☐ No sexist, racist or homophobic material will be tolerated – we are a caring, sharing, progressive kind of publication.
- ☐ Ensure that your letter has at least some sort of point. Please, no 10,000-word-long lists of questions, consisting of nonsense like "where's the naked Lara cheat?" or "is GameCube backwards compatible with SNES cartridges?"
- ☐ No rabid fanboy nonsense. If you think "SEGA/Microsoft/Sony RuLeZ!!!!" then keep it to yourself.
- ☐ No comments like "you guys rock!!!!" or "you guys suck!!!". We're well aware that we rock/suck, etc.
- ☐ If you disagree with anything contained in the magazine, then feel free to write in and tell us why, but try to avoid descending into blind, ugly abuse. We bruise easily.
- ☐ No exclamation marks!!!!!!! They make us angry. And they'll make you look like you're writing for a student rag mag.
- ☐ Keep it relevant (more or less). *games™* is a videogames magazine – consequently, letters should be about some aspect of gaming, not what you had for supper last night.

We're sorry if all this makes us sound like a bunch of whining, arrogant snobs, but we're just trying to whip up some intelligent discussion. Oh, and before you ask, letters may be edited for length and clarity. So there.

GET ONTO THE

Why not get yourself on our very special, dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who have bought this issue of ***games™*** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to engage in anything less than highly perceptive and witty discussions about videogames…

FOLLOW THESE QUICK STEPS TO GETTING TO THE **games™** FORUM AND ENJOY HASSLE-FREE CHATTING TO THOSE OF US WHO SHARE A PASSION FOR GAMING.

STEP ONE:

Get yourself online. It's fairly simple – most PCs and Macs these days are internet capable, whether they're at college, school or a public library. Tempted to surf the web at work? Check your company's Internet policy first – it might be a better idea to go to an internet café. And of course, if you're a bit la-di-da, you might have a computer at home. We understand they're quite popular now…

WHERE IT'S AT

To find out what all the fuss is about, why don't you check out the forum yourself (if you haven't already). Joining in couldn't be simpler, and we're terribly welcoming.

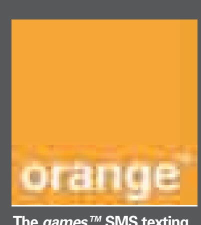
01



SMS TEXT

We've got an exclusive SMS text service sponsored by Orange. Simply text us your question or comment on

07970 043498



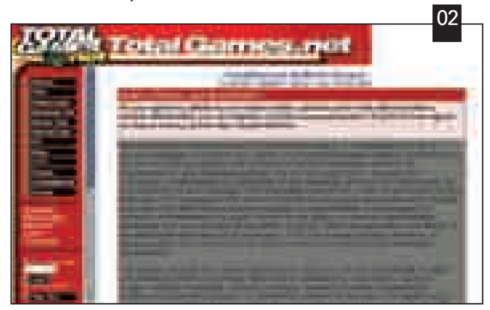
The *games™* SMS texting service is brought to you courtesy of Orange. For more information on Orange's range of wirefree™ games log on to: www.orange.co.uk/multimedia

FORUM

STEP TWO:

Type the following into the browser window: www.totalgames.net/forum/. This will give you read-only access to the forum. To get in on the fun, you'll have to register – you can do that by clicking on the originally titled 'register' icon at the top of the page. Fill in your details, choose a name and then wait for a password to be emailed to you (which will arrive in no time).

02



STEP THREE:

Once you're registered and equipped with your password, the next step is to actually get on the ***games™*** forum. Obviously, clicking on the '***games™*** forum' icon is the way forward. Unlike other forums on the site, this one asks you for a password. Simply type 'lips' (but don't use the ' ' marks) and you'll be granted access to the forum. Once there, you should find plenty of like-minded people chatting away, heck, you might even find members of the *games™* team offering snippets of info and wisdom (well, maybe not).

03



MAKING CONTACT

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with ***games™***, the traditional letter method is perfectly acceptable though, using the address below:

games™
Paragon Publishing Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

But there is a quicker way to reach us, thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**



CONTINUE 10

CREDIT 3

